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Alf Ramsey

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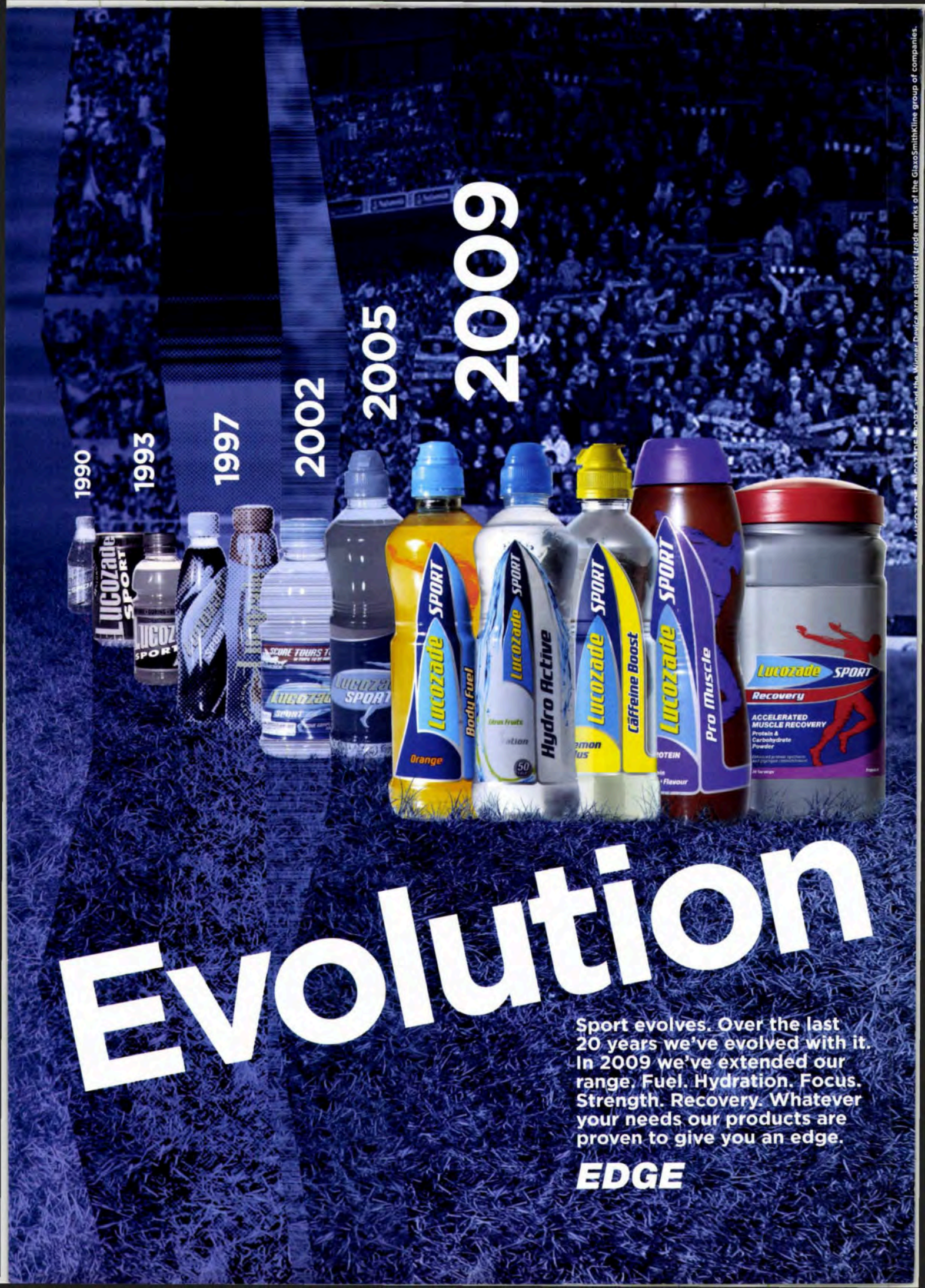

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August 2009

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EUROPEAN FOOTBALL IS BACK – not that it was away for very long. The new season in Europe dominates our coverage this month and inevitably it is the big-name movers at the continent's best-known clubs who grab most of the headlines.

Although we're still emerging from that summer twilight zone, where rumour meets fact in the transfer market, the close season's big deals have prompted unavoidable debate over which league is the strongest.

We used to talk about the Big Five leagues of England, France, Germany, Italy and Spain – and our coverage still reflects the importance of that quintet. Increasingly, though, it seems more appropriate to refer to the Big Two. With the start of each new season, England's Premier League and Spain's La Liga pull further away from the rest of Europe.

The most notable development this summer has been the continued decline of Italy's Serie A – as evidenced by the departure of Kaka to Real Madrid, Carlo Ancelotti to Chelsea and, as I write, Zlatan Ibrahimovic to Barcelona. Serie A's decreasing status will appear all the more notable as we head into 2010 and the Italian national side prepare to defend their world title in South Africa.

That's assuming, of course, that the *Azzurri* qualify. World Cup qualification will be just one of the many intriguing themes of a season that promises so much. It's also a year in which we celebrate *World Soccer*'s 50th birthday. But more of that nearer the time. Enjoy the season!

GAVIN HAMILTON, Editor
gavin_hamilton@ipcmedia.com

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...IN PICTURES

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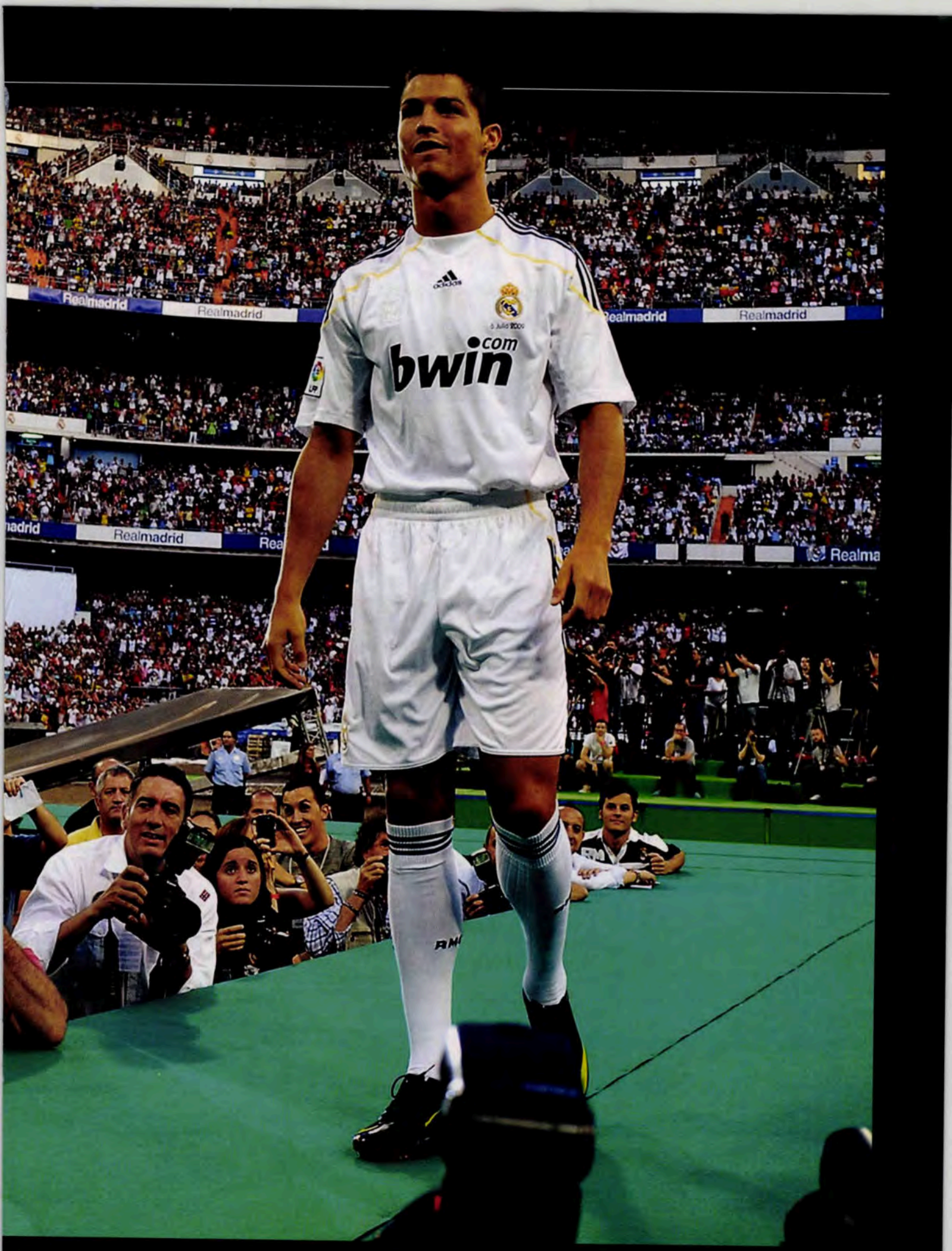
The Real deal....Cristiano Ronaldo joins the galactico revolution as he is unveiled in front of the world's media and a packed Santiago Bernabeu in Madrid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Stars and spikes...a USA fan enjoys the Gold Cup

Bad loser...Panama's Felipe Baloy takes a swing at a security guard after their Gold Cup exit to USA

It's started again...Kalmar keeper Petter Wasta is busy in the Champions League

Stoned...Argentinian police shelter from a hailstorm in Buenos Aires

Down tools...South African workers go on strike outside Soccer City in Soweto

Gotcha...a Velez Sarsfield fan is arrested after their Argentinian league victory

Brian Glanville

...on the impending chaos of South Africa's World Cup... Michael Owen's surprise move to Manchester United... Liverpool's farcical signing of Glen Johnson...and the alarming rise of Mike Riley

THE sheer, mindless, Blatteresque irresponsibility of having the World Cup finals of 2010 in South Africa has been all too starkly shown up by three admirable English correspondents who were sent to the Confederations Cup when it was largely and foolishly ignored by the British press at large.

The tournament was, in its negative way, highly significant, chiefly by showing the present surprising mediocrity of international football to such an extent that you really do feel Fabio Capello's team, however limited, could have a chance.

The football correspondents flocked instead to the somewhat peripheral European Under-21 finals in Sweden where, despite all that ranting and raving on the touchline, Stuart Pearce's team crashed 4-0 to Germany in the Final. This didn't prevent the new chief honcho at the Football Association – I keep forgetting his name, but I don't believe he's had anything much to do with football – expressing great faith in Pearce, who was ludicrously given an extended contract before the talented young Germans cut England to pieces.

About the only thing Pearce seems to have got right was the taking of penalties – yes, he missed that one in Turin in 1990 – though, even here, his team barely scraped through after throwing away a 3-0 lead against the Swedes in the semi-final.

As for the Confederations Cup, it was won by a Brazil team lucky indeed to scrape through on a last-ditch penalty – seemingly awarded on the basis of video evidence – in a game where the unfancied Egyptians scored no less than three times. They then had to recover in the Final against USA, who were 2-0 up at half-time. Astonishingly, this USA team had also brought Spain crashing to earth 2-0, after a 35-match unbeaten run.

As for the *Azzurri*, Marcello Lippi's half-baked attempts at excuses for Italy's defeat by Egypt and that 3-0 thrashing by Brazil were pitiful. In the first instance, he declared that his players hadn't followed his advice in the first half, then he admitted he had expected to see a better Italian performance, but that things would improve. Well, will they? The embarrassing truth seems to be that his World Cup-winning 2006 team has simply fallen apart and it will take more than the promising young striker Giuseppe Rossi to revive it.

Holland weren't there, so they are entitled to be encouraged. Argentina weren't there either but so what? That six-goal thrashing by Bolivia on the breathless heights of La Paz and that more recent 2-0 defeat in Ecuador tell their own tale: above all, perhaps, that Diego Maradona was a silly, sentimental choice, apparently by the federation president Julio Grondona against general opinion, as manager. In that old catchphrase, "he'll have to go".

Arguably more important than whatever happened on the field in South Africa – where their own team got better and better – were events off it. Credit, then, to my colleague Keir Radnedge and to *The Times* correspondents, Gabriele Marcotti and the commendably thorough Owen Slot, for their dispatches from that troubled land.

Radnedge was appalled by the criminality, though to those of us who have followed the news for some years it has hardly been a surprise. Statistics are more and more alarming. Anecdotally, Keir has put flesh on the bones. All too much of it. And he makes it only too clear that the South African organisers hardly give a damn about what happens to the tens of thousands of fans who, poor devils, will pour in.

He quotes the sheer indifference of Fikile Mbalula, deputy minister responsible (responsible?) for security, over the safety of those outside the magic official circles, and gives chapter and verse of some of the crimes committed while he was there.

Sign of the times...rioters trample debris on the outskirts of Johannesburg

Marcotti tells a terrifying tale of a four-hour night drive from Bloemfontein to Johannesburg on a black as pitch, wholly unlit, two-lane road, and stresses that people are advised not to travel by train or bus. And once they are there where will they stay? Hotels are at a premium, private families can take up only so much of the slack. Even Blatter says that the cold South African winter makes camping out unfeasible, yet at Polokwane, the venue farthest north, there are desperate plans to arrange a camping site on school grounds to accommodate 2,000 people! There is talk of fans going to Zimbabwe, only 135 miles away, but what hotels would there be in that benighted, starving, viciously oppressed country?

Slot also paints a chaotic picture of stadium building, which has not only

"Marcotti tells a terrifying tale of a four-hour night drive to Johannesburg"

soared in cost but prepared the kind of herd of post-tournament white elephants to be found after the 2002 World Cup in South Korea and Japan. In at least two cases, stadia were built at colossal expense when there was already a local stadium designated for the tournament. In one instance, the new stadium was built right beside another!

Oh, and 70,000 building workers recently went on strike, demanding a 13 per cent rise in wages though, by the time you read this, I imagine some kind of compromise will have been reached. The chief executive of the tournament, Danny Jordaan, promised Slot "the world will be surprised", but there are surprises and surprises.

SPEAKING of surprises, Manchester United's acquisition of Michael Owen was a huge one. Not least as it came – a psychological blunder, surely – hot on the heels of the £80million sale to Real Madrid of the irreplaceable, unique Cristiano Ronaldo. This, shortly after Owen's misguided advisers had put out a pathetic brochure enumerating his strengths and virtues, and something which might be interpreted as a desperate plea.

Owen, in his prime, has been one of the finest England players produced since the last war, a glorious hero of the 1998 World Cup where, as an 18-year-old, he terrorised defences even as formidable as Argentina's. But that long catalogue of injuries has, alas, wrecked his game and, although he is said to have sailed through a stringent medical at United, his electric pace is but a memory.

He's a rich young man with a string of racehorses. Why bother to play on?

RAFA Benitez can sometimes seem a curiously erratic manager and one who might be wise to cut down on his public statements after aiming a rocket at Gareth Barry, who had the temerity to snub Liverpool and leave Aston Villa for Manchester City for a £12m fee and £130,000 a week.

It is true that a year or so ago Barry, whom I have long admired as a player, was dead keen to join Liverpool so he could play in the European Cup, but Martin O'Neill persuaded him to stay. True, he won't be playing in Europe for Manchester City, but that money will surely be a major consolation, and why should he not accept it? I am quite sure that Barry last year did, indeed, want to go to Anfield but money talks loud and long.

Meanwhile, £17m seemed a farcical amount for Liverpool to pay for Glen Johnson who, when he went from

Overpriced?...Bneitez greets new boy Johnson

Chelsea to Portsmouth, cost just £4m. Although he is a splendidly fast, talented and menacing figure going forward, he is by no means as reliable in defence.

AND the new Premier League referees' supremo is...Mike Riley. Cue John McEnroe: "You cannot be serious!"

Riley has long seemed to me an alarming referee. Some months ago, he was strongly criticised by Graham "Three Cards" Poll and, though there may have been a slight green-eyed element there, Poll's verdict had a basis in reality. In a match at Liverpool, Riley quite erroneously sent off Chelsea's Frank Lampard, but didn't dismiss team-mate Jose Bosingwa for a bad foul on Yossi Benayoun. "Riley's style of refereeing is not one I enjoy," wrote Poll. "He doesn't have empathy with players, nor a feel for the game. He is a manufactured referee, but one who usually gets the big decisions right." Eh?

New referees' supremo...Riley

GOALS

WE'D LIKE TO SEE AGAIN...

Spain stunner...Mphela

1 Katlego Mphela, South Africa v Spain
Dipping free-kick over the wall and into the top corner

2 Alfredo Moreno, San Luis v Tigres
Cushioned a cross on his chest before turning and volleying home

3 Mones Chery, Haiti v USA
Rising right-foot shot into the top corner

4 Falcao, Brazil v Romania (futsal)
An amazing flick over the goalkeeper's head before nodding the ball home

5 Amri Yahyah, Malaysian XI v Manchester United
First of a double against the touring Premier League champions, a dipping volley from 25 yards

Happy Haitian...Chery

6 Travis Dodd, Adelaide United v Perth Glory
Dribbled past several defenders and then walked the ball around the keeper before calmly tapping it into an empty net

Futsal frolics...Falcao

To see clips of these goals, visit www.worldsoccer.com

NUMBERS GAME

27
goals scored by La Liga club Villarreal in a pre-season friendly against regional side Navata

15,000
volunteers wanted by South African World Cup organisers

12
years old, the age of Mauricio Baldivieso when he appeared as a substitute for Aurora against La Paz in the Bolivian closing championship

42
deaths from soccer-related violence in the past decade in Brazil, according to a recent academic study

80,000
fans who turned up at Santiago Bernabeu to greet new Real Madrid signing Cristiano Ronaldo

23,238
official attendance at Giants Stadium to see David Beckham's return for LA Galaxy against New York Red Bulls in July

66,000
attendance for David Beckham's first appearance for Galaxy in New York, back in 2007

REPORTS we couldn't make up

PLAYER KILLS FAN

Javier Florez, a midfielder with Atletico Junior of Colombia, admitted shooting dead a fan who heckled him over his poor performance.

Florez shot 27-year-old Israel Castillo with a handgun after he had called him *maleta* (lousy). Florez fled from the scene in Barranquilla, but later turned himself in to authorities and was charged with aggravated homicide. He pleaded guilty to illegally carrying a firearm and could face up to 50 years in jail.

Castillo was one of a group taunting Florez after Atletico had lost to Once Caldas. Florez said: "I was drunk, full of hate, of fury. They challenged me to fight. I went up to them, pulled the gun out and one of them jumped at me to take it away. In this altercation, the horrible thing happened. I shot several times. I don't remember very well."

MUD, SWEAT AND TEARS

It is our duty to report that the 2009 swamp soccer world championships were recently held in Strachur, Scotland.

Swamp soccer is a six-a-side game, lasting 12 minutes each way, and played on a five-a-side-sized pitch of mud and more.

Teams competing in this year's championships included the appropriately named Real Mudrid, Mudchesthair United, Swampdoria, Cowdungbeath and the Fuddy Muckers.

The men's tournament was won by FC Full Gunge, who beat The Chocolate Men 1-0 in the Final, while the mixed final – yes ladies play as well – saw FC Top Gunge clean up with a 2-1 victory over Deep, Down and Durty.

Swamp soccer...time for an early bath?

RUMOURS we'd like to believe

- Teenage Argentina and Racing Club midfielder Franco Zuculini turned down Werder Bremen before opting for another Bundesliga side, Hoffenheim.
- Manchester City failed to recruit Bayern Munich's veteran Brazil midfielder Ze Roberto on a Bosman. The 35-year-old signed for Hamburg, saying: "I've no desire to live in England."
- Brazil defensive midfielder Felipe Melo was strongly tipped to leave Fiorentina for Arsenal or Inter. Instead, Juventus won the day, spending £19million on the 26-year-old.
- On loan at Cagliari for the past two seasons, Italy Under-21 striker Robert Acquafresca was expected to return to parent club Inter this summer. But the latter passed, inserting him in the deal to bring in Genoa striker Diego Milito. Strangely, Genoa did not want him either – having already signed Sergio Floccari and Hernan Crespo – so he finally plumped for Atalanta.
- For some time this spring Sunderland's on-loan French striker Djibril Cisse looked set for a move to Tottenham, only to end up in Greece with Panathinaikos, who paid Marseille, the owners of Cisse's contract, £7m for him.

Off to Juve...Felipe Melo

Paul Gardner

Words speak louder than actions

FOR SOME TIME now I have been working on a splendid theory that intimately connects football with writing. Well, with words at least. My point is that intelligent thinking about football is the necessary first step towards actually playing intelligent football.

Yes, I'm aware that's not a brilliantly original thought, but in the case of football, I have distilled "intelligent thinking" down to words. It's the vocabulary I'm interested in.

I have been studying only the English language – an obvious choice, given that the Brits started this whole thing, and one that has the added advantage of making life easier for me.

So here is my first conclusion: the British are hopeless at football because their football vocabulary is overblown, out of date, ugly and inaccurate. As such, it is a pretty fair reflection of the sort of game that the Premier League would dish up if you banished all the foreigners. The sort of football that, in a slightly refined mode, regularly sees England dumped out of the World Cup.

Two essential words of the British football vocabulary are "knock" and "little". Knock. Now there's a nasty word for you. Would one expect there to be much subtlety in a version of football where the ball is "knocked" all the time? One would not.

Nor would one expect such things in a sport where any action involving exceptional skill is automatically diminished as "little". I have, for example, established beyond all reasonable doubt that there is no such thing in British football as a backheel. It is always a "little backheel". Same with a chip; always a "little chip".

This insistence on belittling the game's more intricate skills is at its worst when the Brits try to describe the short-passing game. The short passes become little passes. The wall pass becomes a little give-and-go.

So it goes – little, little, little – a condescending word that carries with it a hint of the curled lip. Leaving you to understand that the real game of football is about hefty 40-yard balls. Now that's what we call a pass in England. Don't laugh. Attend any game in England, wait for the ball to be swung from one wing to the other – and then listen to the applause. Not wild cheering, but always a noticeable burst of clapping. An atavistic reaction from earlier days when the football was even cruder, but one that the British fans seem unable to shake. And the cross-field passes I mean, from touch line to touch line, are invariably performed in no-pressure situations and achieve nothing.

Ugliness and inaccuracy

As a prime current example of ugliness and inaccuracy in terminology, I offer you the "second bookable offence", supposedly indicating that a player has received his second caution. Of course it doesn't say that, merely that the player has committed a foul that should draw a caution. But it might not – there are probably several examples per game of bookable offences that are not booked.

What matters here is what the referee does, not so much what the player has done. The phrase should be "second caution" or "second yellow", which are simpler, more accurate and more colourful.

As to being out of date, how can people still talk of a centre-half when the position went out of the game some 80 years ago? Has no one noticed that a centre-half is not a half-back, but a defender?

Things are not much better when we switch to the other end of the field. I recently read of a forward being praised for "leading his line well". In this era of the lone-striker formations, which line would that be?

Backheel...a nice "little bit of skill" from the Premier League

Then there's the "clean sheet", which summons up an image of soiled bed linen but I suppose has its origin in accounting or bookkeeping, and is an absurdly archaic linkage.

The Americans have a much better, more muscular, sporty sounding term: "shut out".

The Americans also have the highly useful "assist", a word and a stat that the Brits refuse to use – simply, I suspect, because they look down their noses at anything in football that is of American origin. Yes, there are difficulties in defining an assist, but nothing that cannot be solved. Heck, even FIFA now uses the assist stat in its World Cup reports.

There is also room for another end-of-season award – one that would be a genuine reward for a key skill that currently goes unacknowledged when the prizes are handed out. A player who scores 30 goals and has five assists will likely win the scoring championship; a player with five goals and 30 assists will get nothing.

This is also an example where the vocabulary reflects the football. The players who rack up the most assists are the playmakers, a category that is not exactly thick on the ground in British football.

The frequently heralded but yet to materialize modernisation of the British game might better start in the vocabulary than on the field. ●

"Intelligent thinking about football is the necessary first step towards actually playing intelligent football"

David Conn

Who pocketed the cash from Tevez deal?

SO, FINALLY, the Carlos Tevez saga closed a tumultuous chapter, and entered a new future, with his £25million acquisition as part of a promiscuous round of striker shopping by Sheikh Mansour's Manchester City.

Just after the Argentinian was unveiled at City – grumbling that Alex Ferguson had not wanted him enough at Manchester United – the FA and Premier League slipped out the news that they had cleared West Ham of any further wrongdoing in the morass of their conduct over Tevez.

And that, we are supposed to feel, is that. Since he landed in English football in 2006, with his World Cup team-mate Javier Mascherano and joined the humble Hammers in that shock move, Tevez has zipped tirelessly across penalty boxes, kept West Ham up single-handedly, won two Premier League titles and the Champions League with United, and trailed mystery and unease in his considerable slipstream.

When it emerged that West Ham had not signed the two stars outright but on loan from "third-party investors" who owned their economic rights, English football had its introduction to this alien practice, widespread in South America. Kia Joorabchian then made his entrance as the representative of the investors who owned the players' registrations via two offshore companies: MSI and Just Sports Inc. And in three years, Joorabchian has never disclosed who those owners are.

In April 2007, West Ham were found to have withheld contract documents from the Premier League which showed that Joorabchian's associates "owned" the players, and an independent panel decided the arrangements gave those third parties influence over team affairs, which is prohibited by the league's rules.

West Ham were fined a record £5.5m – but controversially not deducted points – and told to rip up their deal with Tevez's controllers if they wanted to keep him.

After the club said it had done so, Tevez played like a mighty atom to keep the Hammers up, including scoring the only goal in the last game of the season at a drizzly Old Trafford where United were already crowned Premier League champions. Ferguson evidently liked what he saw and signed the Argentinian – again on loan from Joorabchian's investors.

Sheffield United, who went down, sued West Ham, arguing that the London club's breaches of the rules had cost them their place in the Premier League. The case was referred to arbitration under FA rules and West Ham lost. The judge, Lord Griffiths, found that West Ham had not truly ripped up their deal with Tevez's investor-owners, but their chief executive, Scott Duxbury, had engaged in "oral cuddles" to reassure Joorabchian that his associates' ownership was still considered valid.

City slicker...Tevez

Since Tevez and Mascherano arrived, the distaste in England with the idea of businessmen-investors owning young footballers led to the practice being banned

After weeks of wriggling, West Ham settled with Sheffield United, agreeing to pay the Blades £21m in compensation for the financial costs of falling out of the Premier League.

The Premier League and FA then announced a new inquiry into Griffiths' findings, and that was the result that was slipped out following Tevez's move to Eastlands: no further action will be taken.

No explanation accompanied that announcement and we are all expected to forget there ever was a ruling by a former law lord which resulted in West Ham paying over £20m in compensation.

Since Tevez and Mascherano arrived in the Premier League, the distaste in England with the idea of businessmen-investors "owning" young footballers led to the practice being banned. Mascherano has been bought outright by Liverpool, and Mansour's City, for their £25m, now own Tevez's registration.

Joorabchian's investors have done their final business with Tevez – and lucrative business it has been.

Tevez said he is at City not for the money – £7.8m a year is the irrelevant pay he will be receiving anyway – but to win trophies, in a squad swollen with players bought with the Abu Dhabi oil riches.

Joorabchian, the player now sold, takes £25m to the unnamed people who bought Tevez – in circumstances Joorabchian has never fully revealed – when the striker moved from Boca Juniors to Corinthians in Brazil. A fortnight before the City deal, a report was published by the Financial Action Task Force, an inter-governmental organisation set up to counter global terrorism, which warned that football is vulnerable to money laundering.

It raised concerns about exactly this kind of set-up, though it made no allegations about Tevez and Joorabchian and emphasised there is no money laundering in the arrangements. The FATF said there is a risk of money laundering, beyond the powers of the football authorities to investigate it, where players' economic rights are owned by offshore companies with unnamed investors.

City's purchase of Tevez has closed one chapter and opened a new era for a player still to prove himself great. But many questions do still remain about who made the money from owning then selling him, and how they came to "own" him in the first place. ●

HEROES...

HORST HRUBESCH
Germany's youth coach added the European Under-21 title to the European Under-19 crown he won in 2008.

ALEX SABELLA
The one-time Sheffield United and Leeds midfielder, and former assistant to Daniel Passarella, steered Estudiantes to success in the Libertadores Cup in his first coaching job.

LUCIO
The defender scored the winning goal for Brazil in the Confederations Cup Final.

Head boy...Lucio celebrates his winner in the 3-2 Confed Cup Final victory over USA

& VILLAINS

Punch-up...Aguirre

JAVIER AGUIRRE
The Mexico coach was suspended for three matches by CONCACAF, and the Mexican federation fined £15,000, after he started a brawl during a Gold Cup match against Panama.

ZE CARLOS
The Cruzeiro striker was sent off just 15 seconds after kick-off for elbowing Atletico Mineiro's Renan during a Brazilian league game.

NANCY
The French side pulled out of friendlies in England, against West Brom and Crystal Palace, because of fears that players might contract swine flu.

IVORY COAST FEDERATION
They were fined £28,500 and ordered to cut the capacity at Abidjan's Felix Houphouet-Boigny stadium after at least 19 people were killed during a stampede before a World Cup qualifier earlier in the year.

BLATTERWATCH
Keeping tabs on the FIFA president

SEPP BLATTER has reassured Holland and Belgium that their bid to host the 2018 or 2022 World Cup will be taken seriously by FIFA, despite having previously dismissed a joint bid from Spain and Portugal.

"This is totally different," says Blatter. "A candidature of the Netherlands and Belgium should be accepted as we have evidence that there is one organising committee...if they talk of Luxembourg too, it is Benelux – which is a political entity."

Blatter made his comments in Brussels during a visit to meet the Holland-Belgium 2018 and 2022 bidding committee.

Open to offers...Blatter

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Boo him like Beckham
Los Angeles Galaxy fans turned on their star midfielder when he returned to Major League Soccer action. More, page 17

ENGLAND
City slickers
Manchester City left their rivals behind after embarking on an £80million spending spree. More, page 40

ENGLAND
Owen springs surprise
Manchester United pulled off one of the summer's most surprising deals when they signed Michael Owen on a free transfer from Newcastle. More, page 40

SPAIN
Madrid present galacticos
Real Madrid start the La Liga season as favourites following the signing of Cristiano Ronaldo, Kaka and Karim Benzema. More, page 56

ARGENTINA
Official complaints
Velez Sarsfield won the closing title after a controversial final-day victory over Huracan. More, page 34

BRAZIL
Estudiantes triumph
The Argentinian side, inspired by Juan Sebastian Veron, beat Cruzeiro over two legs to win the 50th Libertadores Cup Final. More, pages 18 and 24

SWEDEN
Clean sweep for Germany

Germany added the European Under-21 championship title to their successes at Under-17 and Under-19 level. More, page 86

GERMANY
Bayern the team to beat

Bayern Munich, under the supervision of new coach Louis Van Gaal, were once again the team to beat as the new Bundesliga season kicked off. More, page 48

IRAQ
Back home

The national side played their first international in Baghdad – against Palestine – since the US invasion in 2003. More, page 37

FRANCE
Bordeaux start favourites

The defending champions kicked off the new season as the leading title contenders. More, page 44

AUSTRALIA
A-Listers

The fifth season of the A-League began with more returning international stars than ever before. More, page 38

SOUTH AFRICA
Lessons that need to be learned

Brazil won the Confederations Cup but next year's World Cup organisers still have much work to do. More, page 28

Carlo Ancelotti

The likeable Italian will make friends in the Premier League – but will he win trophies?

ENGLAND

FORMER REGGIANA goalkeeper Ettore Gandini is not a player many will know well. He features in a chapter called Seven Minutes In Serie A in my own book on Italian football, *Forza Italia,* and I mention him simply because of something he once told me about his former club coach, Carlo Ancelotti.

Years after Ettore had dropped out of football – his career was cut short by injury – he reluctantly went to visit his old boss, who by that stage had risen through the coaching ranks to the lofty heights of Milan. Ettore, like most of those who played under Ancelotti, had the highest possible opinion of him, from both human and professional viewpoints, and that day at Milanello, Ettore was not disappointed.

Ancelotti greeted him with open arms, immediately offering to see what he could do about some work for Ettore. Ancelotti was then, and still is, the Italian equivalent of a "decent auld skin".

While no one yet knows how things will go for Ancelotti in his new position of Chelsea manager, it is safe to say he will almost certainly – like his compatriot Claudio Ranieri at Stamford Bridge before him – win himself a whole host of new friends.

If Chelsea fans were worried about this appointment, perhaps they will have learned much from the new man's first interview with the club's own television channel.

For months, Ancelotti had been declining to do interviews in English. On the last evening of the Italian season, minutes after Milan had beaten Fiorentina 2-0 in Florence to confirm their Champions League spot, he went on Italian TV to announce he was leaving the club. But when the interviewer suggested that meant he was off to Chelsea, Ancelotti denied it was a done deal and persuaded a group of quote-hungry British journalists that his English was far too rudimentary to do an interview. Yet, next morning, there he was on Chelsea TV giving a long, lucid and perfectly understandable interview – in English – to announce his appointment as the new manager.

The point is, Ancelotti might be a very decent guy but that does not mean he is a fool. Arguably, he is just about the perfect appointment for a club like Chelsea. After all, he has a proven track record at the highest level – two Champions League trophies and one scudetto at Milan – as well as an equally well-proven ability to survive and succeed at a club owned by an immensely powerful, outrageously rich and occasionally interventionist boss – namely, current Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi.

By comparison, Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich will probably seem like the shy, retiring type. While Italian media sources over the years have consistently speculated that Berlusconi imposes his own – not always welcome – views on his coach's choices, Ancelotti has always begged to differ, saying: "We talk often. He keeps himself constantly informed about the team but he has never imposed anything on me and he would never do it because Berlusconi is an intelligent man.

"For Milan, Berlusconi is everything. He has set the bar for the club, laid down the rules of behaviour for everyone and determined the club's philosophy. His presence is a big help. He is absolutely not a problem, indeed he's very rarely here. In fact, if he were here more often, it would be easier for the coach to train this team."

How will he make out at Chelsea? Over the years, Ancelotti has been nothing if not pragmatic. As he points out himself, a side's game plan revolves around its key players. At Juventus there was Zidane, while at Milan, of course, there was Kaka. With players like that, you let them get on with it.

"Before a match, I never tell Kaka where to play," he reveals. "He handles the situations himself, he decides whether to move forward or back 10 metres. He follows his instinct and that is just fine by me."

Blue is my colour...Ancelotti takes possession of his personalised Chelsea shirt

Not for nothing, Ancelotti was believed to be working hard to persuade another of his talented, creative Milan midfielders, Andrea Pirlo, to move to Chelsea with him. Having lost Kaka to Real Madrid, Pirlo would have been the next logical choice in the search for a player who would add quality to the Chelsea midfield.

So, are there no reservations about Ancelotti at Chelsea? Well, there are a couple of things. For a start, he has always seemed very laid-back, someone who was more than happy in his own backyard. Yet, the efficiency with which he has set about learning English would suggest that he has every intention of making a major fist of it in London.

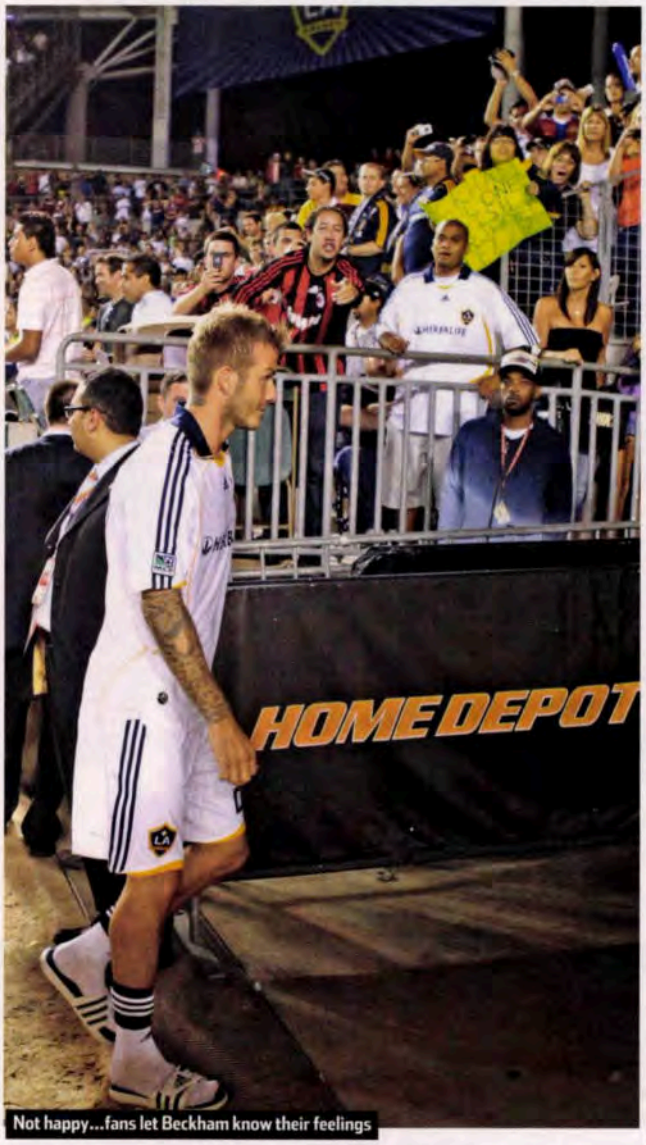
But a second consideration is perhaps more serious. After all, Ancelotti was the man in charge on two of the most celebrated debacles in recent Italian football history. He was the Juventus coach on the 1999 spring night that Manchester United came from 2-0 down to beat them 3-2 in Turin and go on to win that year's Champions League. Then, of course, there was that sensational 2005 Champions League Final in Istanbul when Liverpool came from 3-0 down against Milan to win the trophy. For Italian critics, those were two matches that simply could and should never have been lost.

Has he learned from that? We should soon find out.

Paddy Agnew

David Beckham
Galaxy fans turn on multi-millionaire star

UNITED STATES



Not happy...fans let Beckham know their feelings

THE DAYS when ageing foreign superstars could pitch up in the untamed Wild West of American soccer and be welcomed as demigods capable of sprinkling magic dust on the local savages has long gone.

Perhaps that was the mistake made by David Beckham and his advisers when they nailed the deal with LA Galaxy in 2007.

The timing was unfortunate: within weeks Beckham had regained hero status at Real Madrid and impressed Fabio Capello enough to earn a subsequent England squad recall. Even so, Major League Soccer (MLS) is a "build-up" process not the flawed "build-down" concept of the North American Soccer League when Pele jetted in to Cosmos of New York in the mid-1970s.

MLS did not need Beckham; in fact, he has been a negative distraction from the real evolutionary business of building professional soccer in the US. Rather, Beckham needed MLS more, as a promotional vehicle for his academy project and, along the way, as an entrée for his wife onto the Hollywood circuit.

The truth has emerged simply because Beckham has remained a more successful footballer in Europe than even he had expected. Naturally he wants to extend his career to the 2010 World Cup finals, and the original over-stated premise of an always unnecessary "mission" to the US has been laid bare.

Thus the former England captain, on his return from Milan, was duly booed playing for Galaxy against Red Bulls in New Jersey, and then once more – and more painfully – by Galaxy fans in a friendly against Milan.

It may have been that the choice of opposition and the timing of the game was doubly unfortunate, given Beckham's admitted wish to return later this year to Milan – or even to the Premier League – after the conclusion of the MLS season.

In Los Angeles, Beckham had to be intercepted by security guards at one stage when he approached angry supporters who jeered him and waved placards stating: "Go home fraud!" and "Hey Becks, here before you, here after you, here despite you."

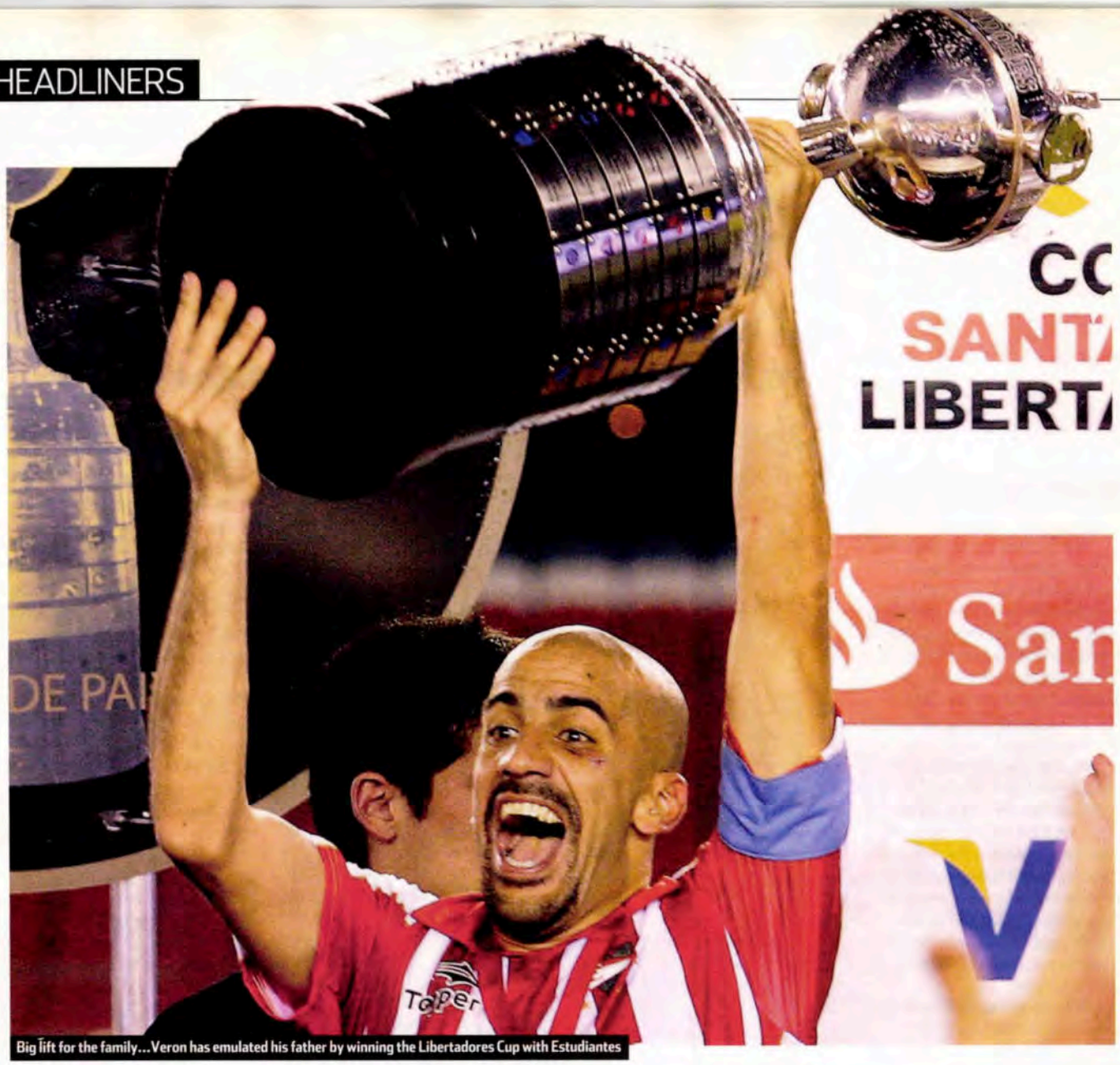
At least Beckham had a hand in both of Galaxy's goals in the 2-2 draw before being substituted after 75 minutes.

Beckham says he had expected some critical treatment, claiming: "This doesn't change anything for me. I intend to stay until the end of my contract and maybe further – I've always said that. I'm committed to the Galaxy and to MLS and that hasn't changed."

The feeling, however, is clearly not mutual.

Keir Radnedge

Confrontation...Beckham has words



Big lift for the family...Veron has emulated his father by winning the Libertadores Cup with Estudiantes

Juan Sebastian Veron
Libertadores triumph for 'little witch'

ARGENTINA

ESTUDIANTES captain Juan Sebastian Veron nearly fell over when he collected the Libertadores Cup and held the trophy aloft.

It was not just the size of the cup that affected his balance; it was also the emotion of the occasion. This was the crowning moment of the veteran midfielder's career, the ultimate justification for turning his back on European football and returning to Argentina.

Estudiantes of La Plata were not only Veron's first club, they are also the club of his father, Juan Ramon Veron, who was their star player four decades ago when they won three consecutive Libertadores titles. Now, in the 50th year of the competition, his son has played a similar role in conquest number four.

In last year's campaign Veron junior sweated and strained but could only carry Estudiantes as far as the first knockout stage. This year, as they beat Cruzeiro of Brazil 2-1 on aggregate in the Final, he gave blood for the cause.

In the goalless first leg of the final in La Plata he was caught below the eye in a clash with Ramires' elbow, and as the cut kept opening up he spent much of the second half obliged to wander over to the touchline for treatment.

In the initial stages of the return in Belo Horizonte he seemed bent on revenge and was booked after a flare-up. But after Estudiantes went behind early in the second half Veron stamped his quality on the game.

The equalising goal was set up by a characteristic moment of midfield imagination, Veron making space left of centre and raking a long, diagonal pass which cut out the defence and fell into the path of right-back Christian Cellay, whose low cross was turned in by Gaston Fernandez.

The winner came from one of Veron's trademark set-pieces, a corner whipped in at pace, curling out and inviting Mauro Boselli's downward header.

Two vital moments of sorcery, then, from *la brujita* (the little witch) – a nickname Veron was born into because his father was known as *la bruja* (the witch) on account of his wild, black hair. Veron junior, of course, favours the shaven-headed style.

He has needed thick skin, as well, to put up with the boos with which part of the crowd greet him whenever he plays for Argentina, though it should be pointed out that there are plenty of cheers as well. Winning the Libertadores should silence some of his critics, and, with Diego Maradona a big fan, the 34-year-old can dream of having another crack at the World Cup next year.

Before then, though, there is still some club business needing attention. Forty-one years ago a decisive goal from Veron senior helped Estudiantes beat Manchester United to win the Intercontinental Cup, the Club World Cup of its day. This December, in Abu Dhabi, they have another shot at glory.

After emulating his father in the Libertadores, Veron junior will now aim to get past Barcelona and do the same thing on a global scale.

Tim Vickery

Robert Louis-Dreyfus
Marseille owner remembered

FRANCE

WHO knows precisely what negative effect owning Olympique Marseille, France's most volatile club, had on Robert Louis-Dreyfus' health. However, it's a fair bet that the seemingly never-ending soap opera of political infighting, together with the club's inability to win meaningful trophies, must have taken some sort of toll.

Billionaire Louis-Dreyfus died on July 4, aged 63, following a long battle against leukaemia, with his dream of seeing Marseille win the French league unfulfilled. The former boss of sportswear manufacturer Adidas, Louis-Dreyfus bought Marseille for £2.2million in December 1996 and the only thing he had to show for almost 13 years in charge, and a whopping £200m spent on transfers, was a paltry Intertoto Cup win back in 2005. During that time he worked his way through four presidents and an incredible 15 different coaches in search of glory. If stability brings success in football, then nobody had told Louis-Dreyfus.

His last major act before his death was to get rid of his friend Pape Diouf as club president. Diouf had put the club back on something resembling a sound financial footing after years of profligate management, but personality clashes within the club prompted Louis-Dreyfus to say goodbye to his pal. He was apparently in tears in his hospital bed once the deed had been done.

There's no doubt that Louis-Dreyfus was a passionate football fan. "RLD doesn't act rationally where Marseille is concerned, in direct contrast to how he runs his other businesses," former president Christophe Bouchet once said. "He's contaminated by being a supporter. And we've never seen a supporter run a club properly."

When Louis-Dreyfus was one of 10 people charged with being complicit in suspect player transfers and was handed a 10-month suspended sentence back in June 2006, Marseille had seen it all before. This was the club, after all, that had been at the centre of a bribery scandal in 1993 that saw them demoted to the second division.

Nobody in their right mind would accuse Louis-Dreyfus of dirty dealings on account of money; he had oodles of the stuff. But by his own admission he was "not capable of running a football club". He claimed: "I want to win so badly sometimes I lose all reason and all logic."

In a business as illogical as football you might have thought Louis-Dreyfus would have found a home. Not a bit of it. And despite his cash, when he died, at least one cupboard was bare: the trophy cupboard.

Howard Johnson

Passionate fan...but Louis-Dreyfus never felt he was capable of running a football club

Thanks, Glenn...Anya shows Hoddle his Sevilla shirt

Ikechi Anya
Wycombe reject living Sevilla dream

SPAIN

FORMER Wycombe Wanderers forward Ikechi Anya says his move to Sevilla is a dream come true after making the incredible journey from non-league to La Liga in the space of a year.

After being released by English fourth-tier club Wycombe, he dropped out of the league altogether, eventually ending up at Oxford City and then Halesowen Town.

With his once-promising career rapidly fizzling out, the 21-year-old Glasgow-born forward decided to take up a place at the Glenn Hoddle Academy in southern Spain. And after starring in a friendly against Sevilla's reserve team, the Andalusian club wasted no time in snapping him up on a two-year deal.

"This is far beyond what I dreamed when I first came to the academy," says Anya. "When they first sat us down they said if you had a preference, what league would you like to play in? I said I would like to play in the Spanish league, so luckily, things just seem to have fallen into place."

Ikechi started out as a winger, but has been converted into a striker since moving to the academy. "Sevilla told me they were impressed with how quick I am, but that wasn't all," he says. "They were interested in my technical ability and they think they can improve that even more."

Former England coach Hoddle, who set up the academy because he believes young players can get lost in the system before their talents are recognised, says Anya's move is "unbelievable", adding: "To go from academy football to Sevilla is a wonderful story."

Ben Hayward

Keir Radnedge

Eastham's legacy

Player power has come a long way in the past 50 years

ONCE UPON a time, back in the days when Newcastle United finished eighth in the elite sphere of English football, there was a player who had grown impatient for a better deal and a grander stage.

An everyday story of (former) Premier League folk? Indeed. Save that this particular eighth-place finish was in the 1959-60 season and the player was an inside-forward – a sort of attacking midfielder in today's parlance – called George Eastham.

Eastham played in all 42 of Newcastle's league games in that campaign and, with 18 goals, was their second-top scorer. He wanted better and asked for a transfer, but when Newcastle refused he walked out and, effectively, went on strike.

After a six-month stand-off Newcastle saw sense and sold Eastham to Arsenal for £47,500. But it didn't end there. Supported by the Professional Footballers' Association, Eastham sued Newcastle and won a High Court judgement that the retain-and-transfer system was an unfair restraint of trade.

And so 2010 will mark the 50th anniversary of the day a man whose determination to enjoy everyday employment rights led to today's remarkable, upturned scenario in which the star players, not their clubs, are masters of their destiny.

Much later came the Bosman ruling from the European Court which swept away most of the employment restraints on players within the European Union (including non-EU countries such as Liechtenstein, Norway and Iceland, whose addition makes up the European Economic Area).

Now decisions on major transfers are dictated by the players. Manchester City said they wanted John Terry; Chelsea wanted to keep him. So for whose voice did the game wait? Not that of managers Mark Hughes or Carlo Ancelotti. It was all down to John Terry.

Franck Ribery appeared perfectly content at Bayern Munich until the middle of last season. Suddenly, Real Madrid wanted him. Bayern insisted they intended to keep him – despite a sudden rash of minor knee ailments which restricted his pre-season training. Who should decide? Not the clubs. Again, it was all down to Franck Ribery.

During the Confederations Cup in South Africa, Xabi Alonso made no secret of his awareness that the slide in the value of the pound against the euro had reduced the original value of his Liverpool contract. He had also spotted that the imminent increase in the top-earners' tax rate to 50 per cent would affect an ongoing contract still further.

Happy coincidence

No one would dream of suggesting Alonso was using the media to issue a broad hint that a return to Spain would not go amiss. Doubtless it was unconnected with the fact that, a week or two later, Madrid stepped in with an offer – such a happy coincidence!

English clubs will continue, thanks to Sky TV, to pay the highest wages in world football. But their attraction will certainly be affected by the tax change as 50 per cent in the UK compares unfavourably with 24 per cent in Spain – not that this means everything. Players at Monaco pay significantly less tax than those with Marseille, Bordeaux and PSG, but the club from the principality have made poor use of that advantage in recent years.

If a player wants to move then all his club can do is shut their eyes and ears, and string out the process to obtain the best possible price. This is what Manchester United managed with Cristiano Ronaldo.

Even manager Alex Ferguson acknowledged, in the end, that Ronaldo's departure for Santiago Bernabeu had been inevitable and even United – the world game's commercial monolith – had been unable to hold him. Their achievement was harnessing his talent as successfully as they did, for as long as they did.

The list goes on. Remember Nicolas Anelka forcing his way out of Arsenal to Real Madrid? Dimitar Berbatov's always-inevitable shift from Tottenham to Manchester United? Michael Essien's insistence on Lyon selling him, against their wishes, to Chelsea? Robinho pushing his way out of Madrid in order to join Chel..., sorry, Manchester City?

I wonder if any of them have ever heard of George Eastham? ●

"Eastham sued Newcastle and won a judgment that the retain-and-transfer system was unfair"

Landmark...George Eastham at the High Court where he won an historic ruling

Read more from Keir Radnedge at worldsoccer.com

Goal or no goal?...Kaka (hidden, far right) sees his effort parried by Howard

Blatter's technical difficulties

KAKA'S disallowed "goal" in the Confed Cup Final will not change hearts and minds within football's governing bodies about technological assistance.

Brazil's outstanding forward in their triumph claimed a goal when, at 2-1 down against USA, he saw his effort beaten out by keeper Tim Howard. One camera angle appeared to show clearly that the ball had crossed the line, but other angles were not conclusive and both the referee, Martin Hansson, and his assistant were unsighted.

No goal was awarded, though Brazil did eventually equalise and went on to win 3-2.

FIFA president Sepp Blatter has always opposed video technology to assist referees, but says he would be prepared to introduce goal-line technology – if an effective system could be found. He pointed out that the demands of the technological decision in tennis are completely different to those in football.

Blatter insists this does not represent a shift in his position on technology. Those of us who remember his strictures about the universality of the game, from World Cup to grass roots, may beg to differ.

Sometimes, however, one has to feel sorry for Blatter. Everyone who makes a public pronouncement is caught out occasionally, as was Blatter by USA finishing runners-up at the Confederations Cup.

Midway through the tournament, with the Americans apparently facing first-round elimination, Blatter had suggested that MLS needed to turn its season around – playing in the winter rather than the summer – if the national team ever wanted to rival the giants of the world game.

So just think, if they had... they might even have won in South Africa.

Puttnam's moral poser

PREMIER League stars such as Steven Gerrard and Ryan Giggs should use their status and credibility to reject football's shirt-advertising commercialisation, says David Puttnam, revisiting the "morality in sport" theme of his film *Chariots of Fire*.

Puttnam, speaking at the Beyond Sport conference in London, criticised both football and the Olympic movement for not making enough effort to bring to bear their power for good, with particular regard to the developing world – something FIFA president Sepp Blatter might wince at with his awareness of the value of the world federation's Goal programme.

Advertising change...Puttnam

Puttnam reserved his praise for European and Spanish champions Barcelona for emblazoning their shirts with UNICEF rather than a revenue-generating commercial sponsorship, saying: "I have spoken to the players and they have all told me about the pride they feel in bearing that message when they take to the pitch for a game."

Puttnam turned to the responsibility of individual players, asking: "How do they feel about being advertising hoardings? If Leo Messi, for instance, said he was not happy to be a hoarding, think how many players might want to emulate his example.

"Steven Gerrard is the sort of leader who could take up the message. Or what about Ryan Giggs? How did he really feel about wearing the name of a bankrupt American insurance company across his chest?

"There are far better causes – and if top players led the way their clubs and the game's image would also benefit from the message sent out."

Mandela's prison...Robben Island

FIFA's tacky tribute

FIFA is studying whether, as a tribute to South Africa's progress since the release from prison of Nelson Mandela, to stage its December 3 executive meeting on Robben Island. One word comes to mind: tacky.

50 best-supported clubs in the world

Manchester United may have been watched at home by more fans than any other club in the world last season – but when it comes to the top 10 of the best-supported sides, the Bundesliga is better represented than the Premier League

1 MANCHESTER UNITED 75,304

2 REAL MADRID 74,895

3 BARCELONA 73,913

4 BORUSSIA DORTMUND 73,802

The Sudtribune at the Westfalenstadion can hold 24,454 fans and is the largest standing terrace in Europe.

5 BAYERN MUNICH 69,622

6 SCHALKE 61,361

7 ARSENAL 60,040

8 CELTIC 57,670

9 MILAN 57,066

10 INTERNAZIONALE 55,185

Loyal supporters...Manchester United have regularly been England's best-supported side – even when they were in the Second Division in 1974-75

11 HAMBURG 54,744

12 MARSEILLE 52,376

13 STUTTGART 51,340

14 HERTHA BERLIN 49,695

15 RANGERS 49,533

16 KOLN 49,086

17 AJAX 49,014

18 NEWCASTLE 48,750

19 URAWA REDS 47,609

The club from Saitama have had the best average attendance for eight of the J.League's 15 seasons.

20 BORUSSIA MONCHENGLADBACH 47,252

21 EINTRACHT FRANKFURT 47,204

22 ATLETICO MADRID 45,474

23 FEYENOORD 44,132

24 LIVERPOOL 43,611

25 MANCHESTER CITY 42,897

26 CHELSEA 41,588

27 NAPOLI 41,253

28 PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN 40,902

29 FLAMENGO 40,694

Fla are Brazil's most popular team and are said to have an estimated 35 million fans.

30 HANNOVER 40,589

31 SUNDERLAND 40,168

32 REAL BETIS 39,926

33 ASTON VILLA 39,812

Full house... a club record crowd of 57,000 saw Hamburg beat Bayern Munich in January 2009

37 ROMA 39,008

Roma have had higher average attendances than rivals Lazio for 20 of the past 21 seasons.

38 PORTO 37,958

Extra man...Werder Bremen have "retired" the No12 shirt and awarded it to their fans

34 WERDER BREMEN 39,641

35 SEVILLA 39,553

36 VALENCIA 39,158

39 ATHLETIC BILBAO 37,737

40 LYON 37,395

41 BENFICA 36,036

42 TOTTENHAM 35,929

43 EVERTON 35,667

44 LAZIO 34,913

A national survey carried out in 2006 discovered that 1 in every 30 football fans in Italy supported Lazio.

45 FENERBAHCE 34,559

46 ALBIREX NIIGATA 34,490

47 WEST HAM 33,700

48 PSV 33,218

49 GREMIO 31,725

50 FIORENTINA 28,928

DISPATCHES

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Alejandro rules South America

Estudiantes, galvanised by a new coach, put their poor early form behind them to notch up another Libertadores triumph for Argentina

BRAZIL

TIM VICKERY in Rio de Janeiro

ESTUDIANTES' 2-1 victory over Cruzeiro in the Final of the 50th Libertadores Cup means Argentina now lead Brazil in the number of titles won by 22 to 13.

However, this seemed an extremely unlikely outcome at the quarter-final stage, when Cruzeiro were part of a four-strong contingent from Brazil while Estudiantes were left all alone to carry the Argentinian challenge. And it was all the more remarkable given Estudiantes' poor form at the start of the competition.

They needed a late strike to get past Peru's Sporting Cristal on away goals in the qualifying round, then they lost 3-0 away to Cruzeiro, beat Universitario of Bolivia 1-0 with a scandalously offside goal, and went down 1-0 in Ecuador to Deportivo Quito in the group phase.

But everything changed with the appointment of Alejandro Sabella as coach in mid-March. The former creative midfielder, once of Sheffield United and Leeds in England, had spent years working as an assistant to Daniel Passarella but, at the age of 54, this was his first job as the main man and it was considered a big gamble by the club.

Sabella, though, had one or two things in his favour. First, he could count on an outstanding player full of motivation. Midfielder Juan Sebastian Veron had turned his back on European football with the very aim of winning the Libertadores with Estudiantes and thus emulating his father, the star man in the club's three triumphs some four decades earlier.

Second, although there were few stars in Veron's supporting cast, Sabella had a backbone of experienced players, with right-sided midfielder Enzo Perez the youngest player in the starting line-up at 23.

And third, Sabella inherited a group that had been together for some time. Many Argentinian clubs have lots of players on loan or on short-term contracts, but the Estudiantes team was basically the same one that reached the last 16 of last year's Libertadores and the Final of the 2008 Sudamericana Cup. During the course of the campaign a couple of experienced defensive re-enforcements were drafted in – full-back German Re and centre-back Rolando Schiavi both arriving from Newell's Old Boys – but essentially this was a group that had become battle-hardened together.

Sabella added the wisdom and the calm to smooth out problems in the dressing room. He also had a clear tactical plan. In his first press conference he announced: "I want a compact team which is aggressive and puts the opposition under pressure" – and that is exactly what he forged.

It was there right from his first game in charge, a 4-0 win at home to Deportivo Quito. Since last year's sale of Pablo Piatti to Almeria of Spain there has been no rapid striker to latch onto Veron's raking diagonal passes, so making the team more compact favoured the team's midfield passing – the man receiving the ball had a number of options – and it also meant that the lack of pace at the heart of the defence was not exposed, which could have been a real problem after an injury to international right-back Marcos Angeleri.

True to Sabella's intentions,

Estudiantes went straight out to turn the screw on Cruzeiro in the first leg of the Final in La Plata.

They pressed high, smothering the dangerous Brazilian counter-attack at source, and in doing so made progress behind Cruzeiro's Gerson Magrao. Five times visiting keeper Fabio was called upon to produce top-class saves.

Cruzeiro were disappointing. A lack of emotional equilibrium had been apparent in the group phase where, despite easy qualification, they accumulated five red cards.

However, the problem appeared to have been conquered in the knockout matches. Although theirs was an injury-hit campaign – 13 players contributed goals – they sailed through to the Final with comfortable aggregate wins over Universidad de Chile and then compatriots Sao Paulo and Gremio. Their hopes were based on a defence improved by the height of Leonardo Silva, Marquinhos Parana playing the "Mascherano role", Ramires bursting and the left-footed Wagner creating from midfield, and up front the talented Kleber making the bullets for Wellington Paulista to fire.

But come the Final they seemed too uptight to produce. They were obsessed with the referee – the more he denied them the free-kicks they expected, the harder they tried to get them, ending up in a vicious circle of protest.

Nevertheless, as Estudiantes tired, the swift Cruzeiro counter started to appear, and in the closing stages the chances went to the Brazilians, including the clearest one of the night: keeper Mariano Andujar could only push out Magrao's curled cross from the left, Kleber tried to pick his spot with the volley and the ball went inches wide.

Confident Cruzeiro

In front of their own fans, and with a 100 per cent home record in the competition, Cruzeiro were confident of lifting the trophy in Belo Horizonte. The Mineirao stadium has a giant pitch – surely there the Brazilians could expose Estudiantes' sluggish central defensive pairing of Schiavi and Leandro Desabato.

In the event the sides produced a third consecutive goalless half, a nervy 45 minutes littered with fouls, flare-ups and sly off-the-ball incidents. There was not a serious shot at either end. Worryingly for Cruzeiro, though, their game lacked any fluidity, while Estudiantes parked

Pride of Argentina...Estudiantes celebrate their fourth Libertadores Cup

Heading for victory...Boselli (centre) twists to nod Estudiantes' second goal in the second leg of the Final in Belo Horizonte

themselves in midfield and showed signs of getting into the space behind the home full-backs.

That all seemed irrelevant when, out of the blue, Cruzeiro took the lead six minutes into the second half, midfielder Henrique's long-range shot taking a cruel deflection off Desabato and flying into Andujar's bottom right corner.

Cruzeiro had done little to justify taking the lead, and justice was done five minutes later when Veron illuminated the midfield with a gorgeous pass into the path of Christian Cellay, who was making an uncharacteristic burst from right-back. Perhaps the home defence could have cut out his low cross, but instead it fell for Gaston Fernandez to score from close range.

It was the third goal of the campaign for the support striker, whose neat touch and good combination play were most often used setting up chances for Mauro Boselli, the centre-forward who would now have the decisive word.

With the away goals rule not in operation for the Final, extra time was looming until, with 18 minutes left, Veron whipped in a corner from the right, Henrique for some reason failed to get off the ground and Boselli's firm header went into the space that a defender on the near post would have cleared had one been stationed there.

Boselli, once of Boca Juniors, is a competent finisher but a striker who supplies little else. His eight goals in the campaign are a tribute not only to his goal poaching, but also to his team-mates' success in supplying him with the opportunities.

Cruzeiro had less than 20 minutes to ensure that Boselli's goal would not be decisive. At last they produced some football. Substitute striker Thiago Ribeiro cracked a shot off the bar, and the same player fluffed a far-post volley, as did centre-back Thiago Heleno. But when the whistle sounded, Estudiantes had won their fourth Libertadores title.

The Brazilian press were quick to recognise that it had been a deserved triumph. Indeed, Estudiantes' record is one of worthy champions – they passed through the knockout stage unbeaten, with six wins and two draws. The retrospective since Sabella took over is 11 games unbeaten, eight of them victories, with only two goals conceded in the process.

> **"The Brazilian press were quick to recognise Estudiantes deserved their triumph"**

Law and disorder...Veron and Cruzeiro's Leonardo Silva get to grips

In addition to the Argentinian success and the Brazilian strength in depth, the 50th Libertadores had something for the Uruguayans to celebrate. Nacional were the country's first semi-finalists for 20 years, and Defensor made it to the quarter-finals. Further north, Caracas of Venezuela made their quarter-final debut, with the side they beat in the second round, Deportivo Cuenca of Ecuador producing some pleasing moments. San Martin also became the first Peruvian club to qualify from the group phase for five years.

On the whole, though, it was not a vintage Libertadores. The quality of play was often mediocre and the quantity of promising young players on show was not as high as usual. Perhaps the return of the Mexican clubs, who withdrew this year in the row over swine flu, will help improve the 51st version of the tournament.

Cup hoodoo

The Brazil national side, meanwhile, believe they can overcome the Confederations Cup hoodoo that has seen every team who have won the World Cup rehearsal fail to collect the real thing a year later.

Coach Dunga and his men have every reason to be confident that this time it will be different. In the current cycle they won the 2007 Copa America, stand top of the table in their continent's World Cup qualifiers – and began their recent run of victories with a hoodoo-breaker of their own.

Brazil had never won a serious competitive match away to Uruguay, but at the start of June they came back from Montevideo with a 4-0 victory. For all the crushing margin, the corner count in that game was 15-2 in Uruguay's favour, but this was a lesson that was underlined time and again during the Confederations Cup: the current Brazil side don't need to have the lion's share of possession in order to be dangerous.

Spearheaded by Kaka, and with Robinho, Maicon and Ramires also able to lead the charge, Brazil's counter-attack is one of the swiftest and most effective in international football. They can legitimately consider a corner to the opposition as a potential goalscoring opportunity for themselves.

Then there are the set-pieces. Brazil have excellent takers of corners and

Dunga delight...the Brazil coach (centre) and defender Lucio start the celebrations as their side win the Confederations Cup

free-kicks, a phalanx of tall players to attack the ball and an interesting range of options. Of the 14 goals they scored in South Africa, in addition to the two from breakouts following corners at their end, their own corners and free-kicks were directly responsible for six.

It may be argued that Brazil have shown their hand early, that coaches all round the world will now have a year to study the trajectory of their set-pieces and work out how to stop the counter-attack at source. Time might also reveal that some of the senior players might have been better advised to rest as much as possible during the close season and ensure there is gas in the tank in 2010.

Dunga, though, could be entitled to look back on the 2009 Confederations Cup with considerable pleasure. His team show a clear tactical idea of what they intend to do and have forged a mental strength in their leader's image. The line-up is full of players he has groomed in the national team: keeper Julio Cesar, right-back Maicon, midfielder Felipe Melo and centre-forward Luis Fabiano were by no means seen as automatic choices when he took over three years ago.

When Dunga was appointed after the 2006 World Cup many saw this novice coach as nothing more than a short term stopgap. Had results been poor that is all he might have been. But with the exception of last year's Olympics, so far all the objectives have been achieved. In May, when Dunga named his squad for two rounds of World Cup qualifiers and the Confederations Cup, there was no guarantee he would still be in charge a year later. After seven straight victories it is very hard to envisage a scenario in which he will not take Brazil back to South Africa next year.

Back home, Brazil's club coaches can only look on enviously at such job security. After 10 rounds of the national championship, eight clubs had already made a change – and with two switching on the eve of the kick-off, half the first division changed coaches in a two-month period.

The highest profile coaches were among the casualties. After winning the last three titles, Muricy Ramalho's formula at Sao Paulo was starting to show signs of wear and tear, and he was sacked when the club lost home and away to Cruzeiro in the Libertadores Cup quarter-finals.

> **"When he took over he was seen as nothing more than a stopgap... now it is very hard to envisage a scenario in which Dunga will not take Brazil back to South Africa next year"**

The 1994 World Cup-winning coach Carlos Alberto Parreira parted company with Fluminense after a run of bad results left the team in the relegation zone. He went muttering about the complicated relationship between the club and its main sponsor, a private health scheme, and was replaced by Renato Portaluppi.

Another former national team coach, Vanderlei Luxemburgo, could doubtless sympathise. He was sacked by Palmeiras for allegedly disrespecting the club's hierarchy when he fell out with striker Keirrison over a proposed move to Barcelona. Palmeiras own just 20 per cent of the player's registration – the rest belongs to the Traffic sports marketing company – and Luxemburgo said he had been promised Keirrison would not be sold for another year.

However, former Real Madrid and Brazil coach did not find himself out of work for long as he agreed to take over from Vagner Mancini, who was dismissed following Santos' 6-2 defeat at Vitoria. ●

Drama...Lucio (far right) heads Brazil's winning goal in the Final

Lessons that will need

TWO CONCLUSIONS emerged from the 2009 Confederations Cup: one was the mark of 7.5 out of 10 awarded to the organisers by FIFA president Sepp Blatter for preparation work; the second was the Confed Cup is now firmly established in the international calendar as an event with a *raison d'être*.

Ever since the first such event was held in 1992, in Saudi Arabia, the tournament has appeared little more than an unnecessary and bothersome appendage to an already over-stuffed calendar. Indeed, the death during a match in France, in 2003, of Marc-Vivien Foe pushed the entire event to the brink.

The last desperate attempt to save the tournament was switching it to every four years instead of every two, and slotting it into the schedule as a World Cup rehearsal for the upcoming host nation.

However, this hardly mattered one year ahead of the German hosting in 2006 as no one doubted their ability to produce top-class organisation. The only hitch was the one in the roof of Frankfurt's Waldstadion that sent a waterfall crashing down onto one corner of the pitch during the Final between Argentina and Brazil.

But South Africa, of course, was always going to be a different story. And the same goes for Brazil in 2013.

Suddenly the Confed Cup has come into its own. Now it is highly important to find out how preparations for the main event are progressing and to assess which logistical problems must be addressed before the world and his fan turn up.

> **"The Confed Cup is now firmly established in the international calendar"**

FIFA secretary general Jerome Valcke said so, in no uncertain terms, the morning after this year's Final when he warned: "Transport is an issue and accommodation an ongoing problem...the park-and-ride systems have not worked, media transport has not worked, the signage has not worked. It was not easy for people to get in and out of the stadia. But there is not one single issue for which 11 months is not time enough to solve."

This why Blatter awarded South Africa marks for effort rather than achievement and his words ran as

to be learnt

Brazil triumph once again as the Confederations Cup comes of age

a cautionary contrast to the euphoric statements issued by local politicians about the state of readiness.

Blatter had deemed the World Cup rehearsal "satisfactorily accomplished", but added: "We know we will have to work on logistics; we do not intend hiding behind compliments. Next year South Africa is expecting 450,000 visitors specifically for the World Cup, and they will want to follow their teams, so they need to be transported from one venue to another and then back to their accommodation."

Cautionary tale

Someone else taking a cautionary tale away from South Africa was Kaka after Brazil's dramatic 3-2 win over USA in the Final in Johannesburg.

After Brazil won the Confederations Cup in 2005 they took too much confidence with them into the World Cup. which was back in Germany the following year, and they went out in the quarter-finals. Brazil are not, insisted Kaka after the fun and games at Ellis Park, intending to make the same mistake twice.

Success...Brazil won the Confederations Cup for a third time

Kaka was voted player of the tournament after inspiring Brazil's comeback win from 2-0 down against USA. Then, remembering four years ago, he said: "We still have to qualify for next year's World Cup back here in South Africa. We have four games to play but hopefully we can qualify with two games to spare. But then we have to avoid the euphoria which winning this Confederations Cup gave us last time. It hindered us in Germany.

"I think this time we will keep calm and rely on the fact that we have played together for so long to help bring us results."

Brazil's coach, Dunga, described his squad as "a very committed team of high quality, very capable players who give their utmost every day – even though they have been away from their families for so long".

With the 2010 World Cup clearly in mind, he added: "I told them before the game that if we could win then we will do much more in future."

USA raced into a two-goal lead within 27 minutes but were then overtaken in the second half. Dunga said he varied his tactics at half-time to sort out some defensive positioning problems and put more emphasis on attacking down the wings.

His substitutions paid off. Just as

Dani Alves had scored the late semi-final winner against South Africa so Elano, with a corner, laid on a late winner against USA – Lucio's goal providing Brazil with a record 16th international title.

USA coach Bob Bradley, while expressing disappointment at defeat in such circumstances, hailed his team's performance, both in the match and in having reached the Final, saying: "It's been a great experience for our team to play in the same tournament as these teams and reach the Final. And, beyond that, the experience in South Africa for our players has been very special."

The initial draw for the two groups had offered up the prospect of Spain and South Africa progressing to the semi-finals from Group A, accompanied by Brazil and Italy from Group B. But Egypt threw a spanner in the works by defeating the Italians 1-0 in the second round of matches.

That set up the concluding round perfectly. In Group A, Spain duly went through after a narrow 2-0 win over an improving South Africa, while Bora Milutinovic's sudden re-emergence on the international stage brought Iraq third place in the table, ahead of outclassed New Zealand.

The drama was reserved, instead, for showdown night in Group B as USA raced from bottom spot to emerge as remarkable semi-final qualifiers after defeating Egypt 3-0 in Rustenburg while Brazil beat a poor Italy by the same score in Pretoria.

This lifted the Americans, who were virtually out of the event before kick-off, into second place behind Brazil. USA had the same goal difference as Italy but had scored one more and therefore qualified for a semi-final against Spain, with Brazil heading off to face South Africa.

The Egypt team which collapsed to American goals from Charlie Davies, Michael Bradley and Clint Dempsey was unrecognisable from the one that had scared Brazil and outfought Italy. It was almost as if – following the scandal of a mysterious theft of money from the hotel rooms of five of their players – they could not wait to run off home.

> "USA ended Spain's record run of 15 successive international victories"

Squeezed out...there's no way through for Spain's Joan Capdevila in the semi-final against USA

Insipid

Italian federation president Giancarlo Abete blamed the *Azzurri*'s poor form – which was as insipid as their new faded-blue shirts – on a lack of fitness after a tough season. Diplomatically he ignored the issue of coach Marcello Lippi's reliance on over-the-hill veterans.

Skipper Fabio Cannavaro equalled Paolo Maldini's national record of 126 appearances in the game against Brazil, but it was one of his worst-ever performances for his country.

The 35-year-old and his world champion team-mates were turned inside out by the skill and delicacy of the football played by Kaka, Robinho and Luis Fabiano, who were superbly supported by attacking defenders Maicon and Lucio.

Suffering...Cannavaro equalled a national record against Brazil, but it was a far from happy occasion for the Italy defender

The Americans sprang another upset in the semi-finals by beating Spain 2-0 on a freezing night in Bloemfontein with goals from Jozy Altidore and Clint Dempsey.

Defeat ended Spain's record run of 15 successive international wins and means they now share Brazil's record of 35 matches without defeat, set between 1993 and 1996.

Coach Vicente Del Bosque, who had won all 13 of his previous matches in charge since succeeding Luis Aragones, said: "These things happen in football. The Americans played with a lot of spirit and commitment and we never dictated the game. We had a lot of possession but that is not everything. This is a setback, of course, but not a major one in the greater scheme of things."

Spain went on to finish third after winning the play-off in extra time against a luckless South Africa. Bafana Bafana had finished up in Rustenburg after losing 1-0 to Dani Alves' free-kick just three minutes from time in their semi-final with Brazil.

Having taken the credit for bringing on the goalscorer only minutes earlier "with just that possibility in mind" in the semi-final, Dunga similarly took the credit for turning things around in the Final with his substitutions and tactical shifts.

With that sort of luck, Dunga and his Brazilians will be the team to beat this time next year too. ●

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Relief all round

Bafana Bafana spared the country's blushes at the Confederations Cup

THEY MIGHT have won only one game and were somewhat lucky to make it through to the semi-finals, but there was much relief that South Africa looked a lot more competitive at the Confederations Cup than had been expected.

It has been the source of much anxiety in the build-up to the 2010 World Cup that the host nation will be unable to produce a side that are able to stir the emotions of the locals and add the same kind of festive atmosphere to the tournament as provided by Germany in 2006.

While the absence of a competitive home side had little effect on the party feel surrounding last year's European Championship in Austria and Switzerland, the atmosphere around South Africa's World Cup will be generated, in the main, by the locals. Incoming tourist numbers are expected to be around 500,000 – which is considerably less than those able to make the short, cross-border journeys to tournaments in Europe in 2006 and 2008.

The Confederations Cup gave South Africa's national side a boost in confidence, particularly after they held out for 88 minutes against Brazil in the semi-final until a Dani Alves free-kick deflated local hopes.

There were also two defeats by Spain, an unimpressive win against lightweight New Zealand and a tentative goalless start against Asian champions Iraq, but still the side emerged with an enhanced reputation.

Whether that is desperate clutching at straws or a realistic view after five matches at the two-week tournament remains to be seen, but there has been much criticism of Brazilian coach Joel Santana and his tactics.

South Africa's failure to take the game to Iraq in the opening encounter – when all the factors were in their favour: home advantage, altitude, support – raised many eyebrows and, though Bafana Bafana were unlucky not to win, the draw left their chances of qualifying in an unnecessarily precarious position.

> "Showboating exposed the immature side of the South African game"

Against the part-timers of New Zealand there was an opportunity for a much more emphatic performance, but showboating and tomfoolery exposed the immature side of the South African game.

Although the hosts won 2-0, they still had to rely on the Kiwis holding Iraq to a draw to go through to the semis. This was achieved despite losing to Spain in a much-improved performance in which South Africa looked equal to the European champions for an hour before defensive lapses cost them dearly.

Defensive lapses

South Africa's last two games provided a big morale boost and drew much approval from the assembled international audience. After years of banging away about the need for a competent host side, FIFA president Sepp Blatter said he would sleep a lot easier and the local association gave Santana and his tactics a vote of confidence – even if his don't-lose-at-any-cost approach is palpably not suited to the African game.

South Africa now embark on a vigorous preparatory programme, enhanced by a decision by the country's Premier Soccer League to cram the league season (plus three cup competitions) into seven months. This is to give the national side two training camps ahead of the World Cup – even though half of the squad is based overseas and will be unable to attend.

One drawback for South Africa is the need to travel in the next few months if they are to play European opposition. Countries trying to fit qualifying matches around a game against the World Cup hosts will not be prepared to make the long journey south to Africa.

There do have one home game, against Serbia on August 12, but then there are trips to Germany, Republic of Ireland, Norway and Iceland. A fixture for November has yet to be fixed and then South Africa will go to Brazil for a January training camp instead of competing at the African Nations Cup finals, for which they failed to qualify. Matches against Japan and Chile are also scheduled for early next year.

Those fixtures will hopefully give Santana the chance to show that the glimpse of potential spotted at the Confed Cup was indeed real. ●

Nervous...South Africa await the result of the Iraq v New Zealand game

Ouch, that hurts...Egypt keeper Essam El Hadary is powerless to prevent Dempsey (out of picture) scoring for USA

Altered States

Bob Bradley's heroes made an unexpected impact at the Confederations Cup

USA

PAUL GARDNER in New York

SO YOU GET drawn in a group with Italy, who are world champions, and Brazil, who are, well, they are Brazil. You lose 3-1 to Italy and then suffer a 3-0 whitewash against Brazil. By any sane measure that's you out of the competition.

However, that was not USA's fate when that happened to them at the Confederations Cup. After they beat Egypt 3-0, and Brazil overcame Italy by the same score, the Americans were in the semi-finals against Spain.

The game against Egypt had shown a different USA. Gone was the tentative team that had faced Italy and Brazil. They abandoned all caution and went rabidly after the three goals that would at least keep their hopes alive.

Tactics? Just keep swarming forward and get those goals. Hardly the way the risk-averse Bob Bradley usually coaches his team, but the new attacking mode worked wonderfully as the Egyptians wilted under the pressure. The highlight for USA was a superb counter-attacking goal, started deep in his own half by the coach's son, Michael Bradley, featuring a perfect one-two with Landon Donovan and then climaxed by Bradley Jnr's superb finish.

The semi-final against Spain loomed as a nothing-to-lose game against the world's best. USA got their feet back on the ground and, said coach Bradley, decided to make "a special effort to shut down Xavi, to make him play the ball square or to the back".

Defensively, USA were virtually perfect. In a game that involved much tackling, they committed only nine fouls. The intricate Spanish midfield passing was neutralised. When either David Villa or Fernando Torres did get to shoot their efforts were usually blocked by a defender. This was not a difficult game for goalkeeper Tim Howard. USA, now playing strictly counter-attacking football, had just two shots on goal – and scored from both of them. Preposterously, the rank outsiders had snuffed out Spain's 35-game unbeaten run.

Of course, such exploits ought to have made all the sports headlines, but this is America we're talking about.

There had been some harsh criticism after the first two losses and a lot of postings on chat sites had called for the coach's head. But after beating Spain his son was being widely quoted with his "All the f***ing experts in America, let's see what they have to say now, all right?"

> "USA must clearly be ranked the No1 team in CONCACAF, doubly so as Mexico are struggling"

The criticism switched quickly and easily to praise, and there were plenty of reminders, as the big day of the Final against Brazil arrived, of USA's "impossible dream" of 1980 when the totally unfancied Americans won the ice hockey gold at the winter Olympics. Bob Bradley, never one to miss the opportunity for a platitude, agreed that "it's a big night".

More of the same

Bradley had done the brave thing against Spain, refusing to go into a defensive bunker, and he had been rewarded with a second goal to seal the win. Now it was to be more of the same against Brazil.

That nightmare 3-0 loss 10 days earlier was like something that had never happened. Now the all-action midfield – missing Michael Bradley, who was suspended after being sent off at the end of the semi-final – frustrated Brazil's playmaking efforts, while the back four of unheralded, to put it mildly, Carlos Bocanegra (Rennes), Jay DeMerit (Watford), Oguchi Onyewu (then Standard Liege, now Milan) and Jonathan Spector (West Ham) kept Luis Fabiano, Kaka and Robinho at bay.

And while those heroics were being acted out at one end of the pitch, at the other end there was Clint Dempsey opening the scoring, before Donovan added a second.

USA 2-0 up against Brazil at half-time? Impossible dream, indeed!

And so it proved. Impossible. Three second-half Brazil goals – two of them headers, not quite the usual Brazilian way – turned the tide and restored some sanity to the global order of football.

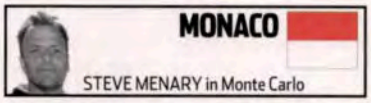
But the game had made headlines in America, and ESPN announced it had drawn the highest-ever audience for a non-World Cup football broadcast.

USA's heroics will mean good things when the seedings comes for the World Cup draw at the end of the year – they must clearly be ranked as the No1 team in CONCACAF, doubly so as Mexico are struggling.

As for the team, Bradley was fielding his strongest XI and next year's team will look very much the same, with one possible exception – Schalke midfielder Jermaine Jones, who has an American father, has announced he wants to play for USA. The 27-year-old has won three caps for Germany, but only in friendly internationals. ●

Principal objections

The Monegasques have encountered political obstacles in their bid to be recognised by UEFA and FIFA



MONACO

STEVE MENARY in Monte Carlo

"THE NATIONAL team of Monaco is very strange," reflects Monaco coach Thierry Petit as he takes a break from training at the Stade de Moneghetti in the northern tip of the Mediterranean principality. "It is possible to have all or nothing. We have nothing."

Petit is not in charge of the club side that reached the 2004 Champions League Final; he coaches the national team of the world's second-smallest country. But while his side meet all the necessary UEFA and FIFA membership criteria, they are barely acknowledged by their own government, who are desperate not to jeopardise AS Monaco's place in the French league by creating any rival distractions.

The influence of the French is all pervasive. Most of the streets surrounding Moneghetti are actually in France and Monegasque players who are unable to make the grade at ASM play for clubs in neighbouring French towns, such as Cap D'Ail.

Outside of income-tax exiles, only around 8,000 people are truly Monegasque and training sessions, which are held on Tuesday and Friday lunchtimes, usually feature a third of the 63 players available for selection.

> **"Every time we play we must ask the government for permission"**
>
> *Monaco national coach Thierry Petit*

Defender Yohan Garino, who is Monaco's most-capped player with 16 appearances, says: "It's difficult for the players as most of us work at the weekends in the casino. It's hard to get the best players there for matches."

A handful of Monegasques have played professionally – including captain Guy Platto (Beauvais, Louhans-Cuiseaux and ASM), Renaud Connen (ASM, Ajaccio and Grenoble) and Gregory Campi (ASM, Rouen, Bari, Impact Montreal, Lille and La Louviere) – but arranging fixtures remains difficult. Last season a 2-2 draw with Occitania was followed by a 3-2 loss to Provence and a 3-1 defeat against ASM's amateur side.

Charity matches

Apart from the artificial turf at Moneghetti, the principality's only other pitch is ASM's Stade Louis II Stadium and Petit's side are allowed to play there just once a year, when two matches are staged in aid of the royal family's worldwide children's charity, AMADE, prior to the annual Formula One grand prix.

In May this year, Petit's side went down 3-2 to a side drawn from the local business community, before a team of Formula One drivers, including Fernando Alonso and Felipe Massa, took on an all-star XI selected and led by Prince Albert.

Monaco's ruler, who played in the second match, personally congratulated his national team for their contribution, but the principality's government banned Petit's team from playing in the 2009 VIVA World Cup (VWC) – which was staged just a three-hour drive away, up the coast in northern Italy.

"Every time we play we must ask the government for permission and the [VWC] organisers are part of the [Italian separatist political party] Liga Nord so they say no," says Petit. "We hope we can go to the VWC in Gozo [a Maltese island] next year."

Travelling to Italy would have cost £12,000 compared to £38,000 for Gozo, but Petit is not disheartened. "We know he is sympathetic," says Petit of Prince Albert, who has been presented with a national team shirt emblazoned with his name.

With so few of his countrymen to choose from, even if Petit's side make it to the next VWC, Monaco are sure to be rank outsiders. ●

All in a good cause...Monaco's Renaud Connen (in white) runs into determined opposition from local businessmen in a charity match

Official complaints

Velez Sarsfield's dramatic title victory was tainted by accusations of poor refereeing

ERIC WEIL in Buenos Aires

RARELY HAS there been such an exciting – and controversial – finish to a championship, with the top two teams, Huracan and Velez Sarsfield, meeting on the final day of the season to decide the 2008-09 closing tournament.

With the swine flu epidemic sweeping the country, it was originally decided to play the game behind closed doors but, after protests, the authorities relented and 45,000 packed into the Velez Sarsfield stadium, where play was suspended for half an hour because of a hailstorm.

Velez eventually triumphed 1-0 but Huracan had good reason to feel that their opponents were handed the title. Having had an early goal by Eduardo Dominguez incorrectly disallowed for offside by linesman Ricardo Casas, who is on the list for next year's World Cup finals, Huracan were further incensed eight minutes from the end. Goalkeeper Gaston Monzon – who had saved a first-half penalty from Rodrigo Lopez – tried to reach a cross but was bundled over by Velez's Joaquin Larrivey, who slipped the loose ball square for Maxi Moralez to fire into an empty net.

The foul on the keeper was ignored by referee Gabriel Brazenas even though he had a clear view. He then sent off Moralez for a second bookable offence, for taking his shirt off in celebration. It is a seldom-used rule in Argentina and hardly fair on a player who had just won the championship.

"I felt sick when I saw that goal allowed," said FA president Julio Grondona. "Especially as it decided the title." Brazenas later admitted his mistake and may now be demoted to take charge of lower division fixtures.

Two days after the game, 500 Huracan fans gathered outside the FA offices to demand a replay – something which has not been done before in Argentina, though it has on a few occasions elsewhere in South America.

Losing out...Huracan's Bolatti goes down in a clash with Moralez, scorer of the controversial match winner

Talking point...Moralez scores with grounded keeper Monzon helpless

Triumphant...closing champions Velez celebrate

Huracan had needed only a draw to win the title and had been favoured by most neutrals because they had played the best football during the tournament under coach Angel Cappa. His side reminded many older supporters of Huracan's only previous title-winning success, in 1973, when Cesar Menotti coached what is still widely considered to be one of the best club sides of all time.

Cappa moulded a team of mostly rejects and loan signings into the surprise of the tournament, with goalkeeper Monzon and attacking midfielders Mario Bolatti, Javier Pastore and Matias De Federico all making names for themselves.

> "I felt sick when I saw that goal allowed, especially as it decided the title"
>
> *Argentina FA president, Julio Grondona*

Talents overlooked

Pastore was the star of the show. The 20-year-old had actually been given his first-team debut in 2007 by current Velez coach Ricardo Gareca, who was then coaching Talleres. Pastore was allowed to leave for Huracan, where his talents were overlooked by previous coach Ossie Ardiles before Cappa "discovered" him.

If Cappa had a secret it was that his players did most of their training work with the ball, while other clubs placed more importance on fitness. During the closing tournament, Huracan were an all-out attacking team, creating the most chances, but converting fewest of them. Even so, they still finished top scorers with 35 goals. Yet in the final game against Velez they changed their usual style in favour of a more defensive approach. Pastore, usually their most effective player, had a poor game due to Velez's tight marking.

Huracan have the lowest budget in the top flight and continue to struggle financially. As an inducement before the game, the players were paid their April salaries but were still owed for May and June. With most of their squad on loan and owned by investors, many are likely to leave during the close season, with Pastore – Huracan owned only 10 per cent of his contract – already signed by Palermo in Italy.

In contrast, Velez are arguably the best run and most financially sound club in the country. They make the fewest transfers in and out and place great value on their junior divisions. As the steadiest team in the closing championship they lost just one of their 19 games and their financial situation allowed them to sign three players – Sebastian Dominguez, Moralez and Larrivey – who all played key roles.

Coach Gareca put great emphasis on his team's defence, in which international Emiliano Papa was outstanding, and they let in only 13 goals – the fewest of the tournament. And as their playing staff is mostly owned by the club, they should have no problems next season.

Lanus, under the leadership of the league's youngest coach, 28-year-old Luis Zubeldia, topped the table with three weeks to go, only to stutter in the final straight and finish joint runners-up. But they picked up the most points during the season and, in Jose Sand, had the top scorer in both the opening and closing tournaments.

Ten of the league's 20 clubs changed coaches during the campaign. In most cases this brought no improvement, but at two clubs it brought a surprising turnaround.

Ricardo Caruso Lombardi took over a dejected Racing after five games, with the bottom-of-the-table side looking certain relegation candidates. However, they embarked on an unbeaten eight-game run and lost only two of their last 14 to finish fifth and scrape clear of the promotion/relegation play-offs.

Estudiantes had won just one of their first six games when Alejandro Sabella – once of Sheffield United and Leeds – was handed his first coaching job. But under his guidance they lost only two more games, despite fielding mostly reserves because of Libertadores Cup commitments. ●

National hero...Jendrisek celebrates his winning goal against Czech Republic in April

On the brink

Vladimir Weiss could be set to lead his country to a first-ever appearance at a major finals

WITH THE arguable exception of Bosnia, the big surprise of the current European World Cup qualifying campaign are Slovakia. Separated from Czechoslovakia in 1993, and forever in the shadow of their former overlords, the modest Slovaks currently top Group 3 – two points ahead of Northern Ireland with a game in hand, five in front of Poland and an astonishing seven clear of group favourites Czech Republic.

Matters will come to a head on September 5 when the Czechs – shock losers at home to Slovakia in April – come to Bratislava. So just how have the Slovaks, who have never made the finals of a major tournament, managed to get so close this time?

Sensational transformation

The answer might lie with coach Vladimir Weiss. A member of the 1990 Czechoslovakia squad at the World Cup finals in Italy, the Bratislava-born midfielder also played 12 times for the newly independent Slovakia before taking up coaching. His stock in trade seems to be working miracles with meagre resources, and in his first job he transformed Artmedia Bratislava (now MFK Petrzalka) into league champions for the first time. He also took them into the group phase of the Champions League with a sensational 5-0 first-leg victory over Celtic.

After a spell in Russia with Saturn Moscow, he returned to Artmedia and led them to the double before taking the job of national team coach.

> "Vladimir Weiss' stock in trade seems to be working miracles with meagre resources"

Among the mainstays of Weiss' current side is Martin Skrtel, who is a regular in Liverpool's back four. Originally a left winger, Skrtel switched to centre-back for Slovakia's youth team at the age of 16 and progressed from local side Trencin to Zenit St Petersburg before moving to the Premier League in January 2008.

Marek Cech, of West Bromwich Albion via Porto, also has experience in the English top flight, as has Chelsea teenager Miroslav Stoch, a bright prospect who made his national debut this year and scored his first international goal, against San Marino, in Slovakia's last qualifying game.

Waiting in the wings is the coach's own son, also called Vladimir Weiss, an Under-21 international who is a member of Manchester City's star-studded squad and who scored against Chelsea in the FA Youth Cup Final last year.

Another reliable performer is Lokomotiv Moscow defender Jan Durica, while Marek Hamsik of Napoli links defence and attack. Hamsik also scored the winning goal in Slovakia's 2-1 win over Northern Ireland at the start of the qualifying campaign.

Approaching a century of appearances, captain Miroslav Karhan is with newly promoted Mainz in Germany after spells at Real Betis, Besiktas and Wolfsburg. A regular for Slovakia since 1995, the 33-year-old is hoping to make a major finals at the eighth time of asking. Meanwhile, another Bundesliga regular, Stanislav Sestak of Bochum, has a habit of scoring vital goals at the right time and it was his two-minute brace six minutes from time that reversed the scoreline to beat Poland in October.

The most unlikely hero, though, is Erik Jendrisek of Kaiserslautern. Voted Slovakia's young player of the season in 2002-03, the 22-year-old striker became a national hero when he scored the 83rd-minute winner in April's 2-1 over Czech Republic in Prague – a result that led to the Czechs sacking coach Petr Rada and six players facing international bans after they were seen out in a restaurant following the shock defeat.

A win on home soil against a depleted Czech outfit will leave the Slovaks with just three more qualifying games: Northern Ireland and Poland away, and Slovenia at home.

Slovakia in South Africa? Stranger things have happened. ●

Back home

The Lions of Mesopotamia played their first game on Iraqi soil since the US invasion of 2001

JAMES MONTAGUE

IRAQ VERSUS Palestine used to be one of those great oddities of international football: a match where both teams were playing home and away at the same time. It was a game between the dispossessed and the homeless; two exiled teams that had wandered nomadically through the empty, foreign stadiums of international football thanks to war, assassination and occupation.

Dubai and Doha tended to be the venues that hosted the two when they fought sparsely attended regional qualifiers, but there was little of that apathy on show when the two met at the Franso Hariri Stadium in the Kurdish city of Irbil in July. Tens of thousands saw Iraq win 3-0 and mark one of the most significant milestones for the country's tentative security improvements: the Lions of Mesopotamia's first game on Iraqi soil since the US invasion in 2003.

The north, which is predominantly Kurdish, has enjoyed some modicum of normality since the fall of Saddam and, after the second Gulf War, the football league was hosted in the safer Kurdish areas. Meanwhile, Iraq's best domestic players who couldn't secure a move abroad fled their clubs in and around chaotic Baghdad, signing up for the Kurdish capital's side, Irbil FC.

Three in a row

The war transformed the previously small and marginalised club into a domestic powerhouse as they went on to secure three championships in a row. The south, however, and Baghdad especially, remained decidedly off limits. While Iraq's FA Cup Final was held in Baghdad last summer, the dangers of domestic football became only too apparent earlier this year when an Iraqi fan shot the opposition's striker in the head as he bore down on goal. Which makes the second international, four days after the first, and won 4-0 by Iraq in the capital's Al Shaab stadium, both significant and remarkable.

> "Tens of thousands saw Iraq win and mark one of the most significant milestones for the country's tentative security improvements"

"It is significant not just for the Palestinians and the Iraqis but for everyone in the region," explained Susan Shalabi, director of the Palestinian Football Association. "The Palestinians, who have themselves been besieged, were the first to break the siege on Iraq."

The return of international football, as well as the return of the football league to the country's cities, is an important political bellwether. So what of the Palestinians?

Although any sense of optimism is proved foolish by history repeating itself, the future certainly looks brighter than it did last year after the Gaza conflict. The West Bank and Gaza leagues will begin again in August, and African champions Egypt will arrive during the same month for Palestine's second-ever home game.

But for Shalabi the result in Iraq, even if it was a 7-0 aggregate defeat, wasn't important. The two games had far wider ramifications. "The only loss was the score," she said. "Everything else was a victory."

Iraqis may well have enjoyed their first taste of victory on home soil, but they will be only too happy to agree with her. ●

Under attack...Iraq's Mahdi Karim puts pressure on Palestine in Baghdad

A-listers

The A-League season kicks off with a host of returning Socceroos in its ranks

LES MURRAY in Sydney

AS THE A-League enters its fifth season, and looks for further growth, its looming big crowd-pleaser will not be a player but a portly 54-year-old mining magnate who is friends with Senator Ted Kennedy and dines with Vladimir Putin.

Self-made billionaire Clive Palmer, who owns new league entrants Gold Coast United, in many ways symbolises the surging relevance of football in a country which, until a few years ago, seemed to care only about cricket, rugby and Aussie rules.

Palmer, who once played junior rugby league and confesses to being a total football novice, is reputedly worth £750million though he claims the real figure is closer to £3bn, which would make him Australia's wealthiest man – and richer than shopping-centre king Frank Lowy, who chairs Football Federation Australia.

The combined influence and commercial muscle of Lowy and Palmer is something no other sport in Australia can claim, denoting football's status as "new money" and the sport of far-reaching horizons. It would not have escaped Palmer, who sells iron ore to the Chinese, that football can be a handy language in international business relations.

Palmer, who likes to be hands-on and talk brash about the prospects of his new A-League franchise, is freely being tipped to lead Gold Coast to a successful debut season. Save for the league's restrictive salary cap, money has been no object in assembling the squad, which Palmer flies around the country in one of his private jets.

Coached by the media-savvy Miron Bleiberg, the Israeli-born former coach of Queensland Roar, the Gold Coast's marquee signing was Jason Culina, 29, the Socceroo midfielder who rejected a lucrative contract-extension offer from PSV in Holland to return in his prime and play in the sun-drenched resort of Gold Coast city.

Bleiberg has also brought in Shane Smeltz, last season's top scorer from Wellington Phoenix, Ivorian teenage left-back Adama Traore and three Brazilians, who were handpicked by the coach on a trip to Rio in March.

Culina leads an accelerating repatriation of Australian internationals from Europe. Perth Glory have recruited three: Mile Sterjovski from Derby County, Chris Coyne from Colchester and Jacob Burns from Romanian club Unirea Urziceni.

Back home

With the return of Culina and Sterjovski, and along with former Rangers defender Craig Moore (Brisbane Roar), John Aloisi (Sydney FC), who is formerly of Portsmouth, Osasuna and Alaves, and ex-PSV man Archie Thompson (Melbourne Victory), five members of Australia's 2006 World Cup squad are now back home with A-League clubs.

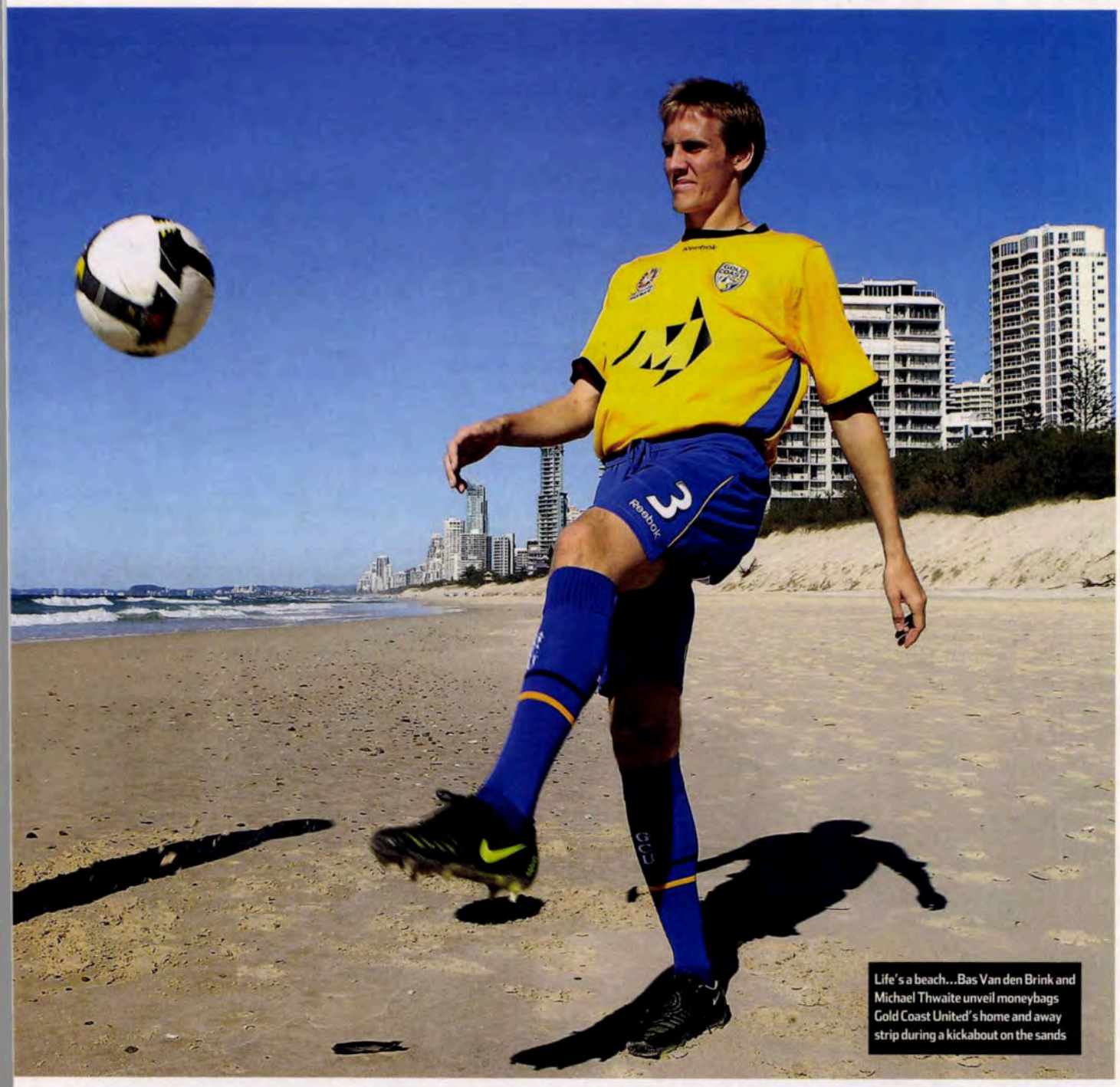
Though crowd averages dropped for the first time in the league's short history last season – to 12,180 – a new surge is expected on the back of the league expanding from eight to 10 teams.

Apart from the headline-grabbing Gold Coast, the other new franchise are North Queensland Fury, boasting the marquee signing of former Liverpool and England striker Robbie Fowler, who is destined to have the turnstiles clicking in tropical Townsville, provided he fully recovers from an injury that has sidelined him since his unveiling in February.

The third source of curiosity having the fans and the media buzzing is a reclad Sydney FC, whose underperformance since winning the title in 2005, the league's first season, has been the venture's distinctive disappointment. Sydney are, by birthright, Australia's glamour club, given that they represent the country's biggest and most cosmopolitan city. They have new owners, a new imported coach and a healthy volume of locally bred youth and promise.

At the helm is 46-year-old Czech coach Vitezslav Lavicka, formerly of Sparta Prague, whose central European

"Former Liverpool and England striker Robbie Fowler is the marquee signing for North Queensland Fury, one of two new franchises"



Life's a beach...Bas Van den Brink and Michael Thwaite unveil moneybags Gold Coast United's home and away strip during a kickabout on the sands

technical mantra and iron-fist discipline is bringing a new culture to a club often accused of player rule and dressing room chaos in the past.

Still leading Sydney's attack is Aloisi, the country's highest paid home-based footballer (of any code), who, at 33, is desperate to put behind him a dreadful season which yielded him just two goals and maybe even play himself back into calculations as a Socceroo starter at the World Cup in South Africa.

The fickle Sydney crowds are destined to return in the new season, though it is doubtful if they will match the numbers in rival city Melbourne where the reigning champions Melbourne Victory enjoy a following that gave them an average attendance of 26,000 compared to Sydney's shrinking 12,000 last season.

> **"Aloisi is desperate to put a dreadful season behind him"**

With all the sexy talk about Sydney and Gold Coast, Melbourne have been preparing quietly. They took permanent ownership of elegant Costa Rica schemer Carlos Hernandez, the league's best player last season when on loan from Alajuelense, and took another year's lease on 35-year old Kevin Muscat, the former Wolves, Rangers and Millwall enforcer, whose leadership qualities were at the centre of Victory's two titles in four years.

The new, expanded A-League will be a subject of some excitement and the ebullient Palmer will be at the centre of it. The crowds will be bigger, but the smart money will probably be on Melbourne retaining their status as its ruler. ●

City slickers

The blue half of Manchester has high hopes for the new campaign after a record summer spending spree, says Gavin Hamilton

FAILING TO SIGN Kaka for a world record transfer fee of £100million last January could be the best thing that ever happened to Manchester City.

Ridicule was heaped on the club's executive chairman Garry Cook after he accused Milan of "bottling" the deal and City, backed by millions of Middle Eastern petro-dollars, were accused of running before they could walk – especially as they went on to finish only 10th in the league.

But six months on, with Kaka preparing for life as a galactico in Madrid, City have instead spent £80m on players who will genuinely enhance their bid to break into the top four.

The signings of Carlos Tevez (Manchester United, £25.5m), Emmanuel Adebayor (Arsenal, £25m) and Roque Santa Cruz (Blackburn, £18m) may appear, initially, to pander to the more fanciful attacking preferences of City's billionaire backers. But the arrival of England midfielder Gareth Barry (Aston Villa, £12m) and the aggressive pursuit of Chelsea defender John Terry suggests City manager Mark Hughes is building a squad of Premier League-hardened competitors who will win points and prizes before plaudits.

> **"Their summer spending has now raised expectations that City can overtake Arsenal"**

Whether Hughes will be given enough time by City's owners remains to be seen. The summer spending spree has piled the pressure on Hughes and raised expectations that City can overtake Arsenal, the weakest of the top four.

The downside of City's spending on established performers was the departure of promising youngsters Joe Hart and Daniel Sturridge, who left in pursuit of first-team opportunities.

City may have distorted the transfer market with their seemingly unlimited bidding – including an offer to Terry of a £250,000 weekly wage – but there is no escaping the fact that the balance of power has shifted from the Premier League to Spain's La Liga.

Hopeful...Torres (left) and Gerrard

The world-record sale of Cristiano Ronaldo to Real Madrid may have left champions Manchester United with £80m to burn, but manager Alex Ferguson is in no rush to spend just

Sky's the limit...Man City fans hope Adebayor will take their club on to bigger and better things this season

for the sake of it, saying: "You don't want mercenaries, to pay over the odds for players not willing to give their all for the club."

Cautious spending

Cautious spending has also been the order of the day elsewhere, even though clubs' revenue was not affected by the collapse of pay-TV company Setanta after ESPN paid £90m for the rights to the 46 games that would have been shown by Setanta.

Nevertheless, the poor value of the pound against the euro, combined with a new 50 per cent tax rate for high-earners in the UK, has made Spain a far more attractive option for

New blue...Sturridge has joined Chelsea

players. At both ends of La Liga, from Ronaldo to Zaragoza-bound Jermaine Pennant, there is more money to be made than in England.

With United so far reluctant to splash the Ronaldo cash, it raises the possibility of a more even league contest. Liverpool, assuming Fernando Torres stays fit and Steven Gerrard stays out of jail, will again be strong contenders, while only a fool would write off Chelsea under new coach Carlo Ancelotti.

Manchester City are likely to generate most of the season's more outlandish headlines and, despite the global recession, we are guaranteed more tales of overseas owners seeking their piece of the Premier League pie.

However, it remains almost certain that the title will end up with one of the established powers again. ●

5 TO WATCH

Expectation...Arshavin is starting his first full season in English football

Roman favourite...Zhirkov

YURI ZHIRKOV
(Chelsea)
A reported favourite of Roman Abramovich, how and whether the Russian wing-back fits into Carlo Ancelotti's tactical scheme will give a good indication of relations between coach and owner.

Opportunity...Owen

MICHAEL OWEN
(Manchester United)
Injury prone and without his once-explosive pace, Owen could still prove an effective impact sub in a rotated squad. Signed on a pay-as-you-play basis, United cannot lose – and England may yet gain a new option for the World Cup.

Rival attraction...Tevez

CARLOS TEVEZ
(Manchester City)
Already a big hit with the blue half of Manchester for criticising United on his departure from Old Trafford. Has the attitude and the skill to become even more popular.

GLEN JOHNSON
(Liverpool)
A huge outlay, at £17million from Portsmouth, but likely to fill a problem position for Liverpool – and has the huge incentive of a World Cup place to compete for at the season's end.

Problem solver...Johnson

ANDREI ARSHAVIN
(Arsenal)
The Russian showed glimpses of his talent upon his arrival in January. Now, following a pre-season break, he could be ready to explode.

TEAM BY TEAM

Arsenal
Manager: Arsene Wenger
Key arrivals: Vermaelen (Ajax)
Key departures: Adebayor (Man City)
Prediction: Boardroom uncertainty will be a continued and unwelcome distraction for Wenger as he aims to win a first trophy since 2005. Belgian centre-back Thomas Vermaelen, an expensive purchase at £10million from Ajax, should provide more defensive solidity and, ironically, the departure of the unsettled Emmanuel Adebayor could improve squad morale. But without midfield reinforcements, Arsenal will be the most vulnerable of the big four to Man City's ambitions.

Aston Villa
Manager: Martin O'Neill
Key arrivals: Downing (Middlesbrough)
Key departures: Barry (Man City), Laursen (retired), Taylor (Man City)
Prediction: The £12m signing of Stewart Downing continues O'Neill's policy of investing in young English talent, but the sale of Gareth Barry to Man City is proof of the trap Villa find themselves in: not good enough for the top four, but better than the rest of the division.

Birmingham City
Manager: Alex McLeish
Key arrivals: Benitez (Santos Laguna), Bowyer (West Ham), Espinoza (Barcelona, Ecu), Ferguson (Rangers), Hart (Man City), Johnson (Cardiff)
Key departures: none
Prediction: Back after one season away, City have spent almost £20m on new recruits and will be confident of avoiding a return to the Championship.

Blackburn Rovers
Manager: Sam Allardyce
Key arrivals: Givet (Marseille), Jacobsen (Everton), N'Zonzi (Amiens), Van Heerden (Club Brugge)
Key departures: Derbyshire (Olympiakos), Mokoena (Portsmouth), Ooijer (PSV), Santa Cruz (Man City), Tugay (retired)
Prediction: Allardyce's summer wheeler-dealing brought in cash for Roque Santa Cruz but he will need to pull off another inspired deal to avoid a relegation battle.

Bolton Wanderers
Manager: Gary Megson
Key arrivals: Davis (Portsmouth)
Key departures: Dzemaili (Torino)
Prediction: Lack of transfer dealing suggests another season of scrapping.

Burnley
Manager: Owen Coyle
Key arrivals: Edgar (Newcastle), Fletcher (Hibernian), Mears (Derby),
Key departures: Kiraly (Munich 1860)
Prediction: Back in the top flight for the first time in 33 years after beating Sheffield United in the play-off Final. Could do a Hull and surprise a few people early on, but they may struggle as the campaign unfolds.

Chelsea
Manager: Carlo Ancelotti
Key arrivals: Sturridge (Man City), Turnbull (Middlesbrough), Zhirkov (CSKA Moscow)
Key departures: Rajkovic (Twente), Sahar (Espanyol)
Prediction: According to chairman Bruce Buck, Chelsea are still seeking a "marquee" signing, while pre-season was dominated by Man City's overtures to sign John Terry. Ancelotti will win plenty of friends with his laid-back style – but whether he can deliver silverware as well remains to be seen.

Everton
Manager: David Moyes
Key arrivals: Jo (Man City), Mustafi (Hamburg), Peterlin (Ventura County Fusion)
Key departures: Jacobsen (Blackburn), Valente (retired), Van Der Meyde (released)
Prediction: Cannot be as unlucky with injuries as they were last season, when they still managed a fifth-place finish and an FA Cup Final appearance. More of the same is expected from Moyes' team, but the squad could be stretched by their Europa League campaign.

Fulham
Manager: Roy Hodgson
Key arrivals: Kelly (Birmingham), Riise (Lillestrom)
Key departures: Andreasen (Hannover), John (Roeselare)
Prediction: Expectations are high but a European campaign will test resources and last season's seventh-place finish could prove out of reach.

Hull City
Manager: Phil Brown
Key arrivals: Mouyokolo (Boulogne)
Key departures: Windass (Darlington)
Prediction: Will lack the surprise element of last season and could suffer with "second-season syndrome".

Liverpool
Manager: Rafa Benitez
Key arrivals: Johnson (Portsmouth)
Key departures: Hobbs (Leicester), Hyypia (Leverkusen), Leto (Panathinaikos), Pennant (Real Zaragoza)
Prediction: As usual, so much will depend on the fitness of Fernando Torres and Steven Gerrard. If those two are on song, Liverpool will go close to their first title for 20 years.

Manchester City
Manager: Mark Hughes
Key arrivals: Adebayor (Arsenal), Barry (Aston Villa), Santa Cruz (Blackburn), Taylor (Aston Villa), Tevez (Man Utd), Zander (Schalke)
Key departures: Gelson (St-Etienne), Hamann (released), Hart (Birmingham), Sturridge (Chelsea), Vassell (Ankaragucu)
Prediction: The pressure on Hughes is already almost unbearable and City will provide much of the season's drama as they seek to break into the top four. More defensive signings will be needed for that to happen.

Manchester United
Manager: Alex Ferguson
Key arrivals: Oberfan (Bordeaux), Owen (Newcastle), Valencia (Wigan)
Key departures: Campbell (Sunderland), Martin (Ipswich), Possebon (Braga), Ronaldo (Real Madrid), Tevez (Man City)
Prediction: Life after Ronaldo? You bet, but it will be a much tighter league campaign than last year, and one in which Wayne Rooney and Dimitar Berbatov must prove their worth. If Michael Owen and the returning Owen Hargreaves can stay injury free, United will be stronger then ever.

Portsmouth
Manager: Paul Hart
Key arrivals: Mokoena (Blackburn)
Key departures: Davis (Bolton), Johnson (Liverpool), Traore (Monaco)
Prediction: A troubled summer takeover occupied everyone at Fratton Park and left little time for transfers. Stormy times could lie ahead.

Stoke City
Manager: Tony Pulis
Key arrivals: none
Key departures: none
Prediction: Like Hull, will lack the novelty value of last season and could struggle without reinforcements.

Sunderland
Manager: Steve Bruce
Key arrivals: Campbell (Man Utd)
Key departures: Chopra (Cardiff), Halford (Wolves), Yorke (released)
Prediction: New boss Bruce faces a challenge in trimming a top-heavy squad, but he has the experience to help Sunderland avoid last year's battle against the drop.

Tottenham Hotspur
Manager: Harry Redknapp
Key arrivals: Blackwood (Arsenal), Naughton (Sheffield Utd), Walker (Sheffield Utd)
Key departures: Gunter (Nottm Forest), Taarabt (QPR), Zokora (Sevilla)
Prediction: Redknapp has been surprisingly quiet on the transfer front, claiming he is happy with his squad, but expected late deals will see Spurs challenge for the European places.

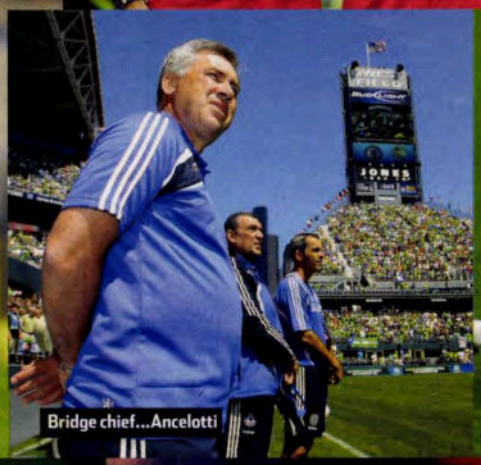
West Ham United
Manager: Gianfranco Zola
Key arrivals: Ilunga (Toulouse), Jimenez (Inter)
Key departures: Bowyer (Birmingham), Neill (released), Reid (Sheffield Utd), Sears (Crystal Palace)
Prediction: Zola worked wonders on a limited budget last season and he will need to do so again. But they have enough talent to avoid being dragged out of mid-table.

Wigan Athletic
Manager: Roberto Martinez
Key arrivals: Gomez (Espanyol), McCarthy (Hamilton), Scotland (Swansea), Thomas (Olimpia, Hon)
Key departures: Camara (released), Sibierski (released), Valencia (Man Utd)
Prediction: New boss Martinez did great things with Championship side Swansea and now gets his chance to prove himself at a higher level. Will win friends but maybe not enough games.

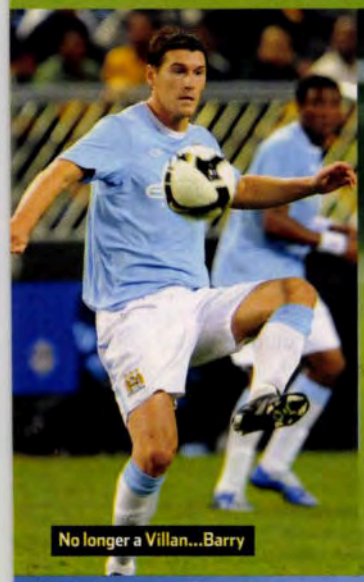
Wolves
Manager: Mick McCarthy
Key arrivals: Doyle (Reading), Hahnemann (Reading), Halford (Sunderland), Milijas (Red Star Belgrade), Surman (Southampton), Zubar (Marseille)
Key departures: none
Prediction: Plenty of summer transfer activity but last season's runaway Championship winners will be happy with 17th place.

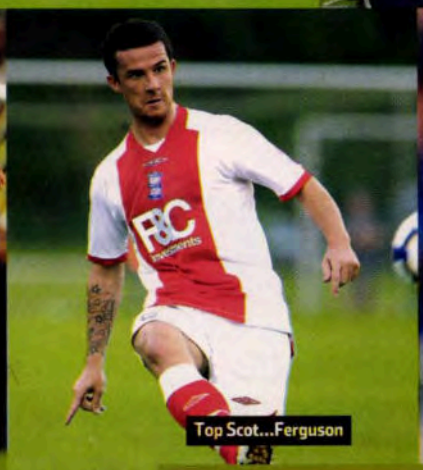
Back for Goodison...Jo

New Devils...(from left) Oberfan, Owen and Valencia


Bridge chief...Ancelotti

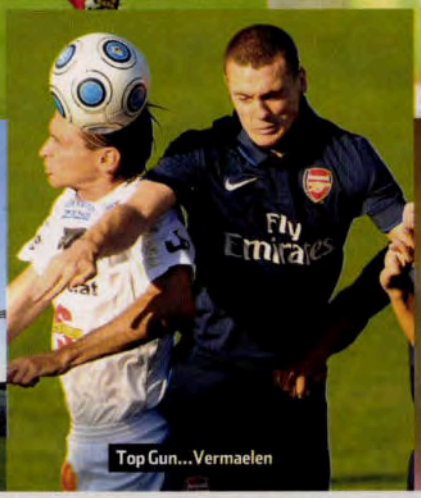
Wanderer...Doyle


No longer a Villan...Barry


Top Scot...Ferguson

Wigan peer...Martinez

Keen Clarets...(from left) Edgar, Coyle and Fletcher


Top Gun...Vermaelen

Experienced...Bruce

Presidential mind games

The pressure is on Laurent Blanc and Bordeaux to retain the Ligue 1 title, says Howard Johnson

HIS PLAYERS HAD barely begun pre-season training before Bordeaux coach Laurent Blanc started the psychological battle. According to *Le President*, his target for the forthcoming campaign is exactly the same as it was last time out: to finish in the top four.

Pull the other one, Laurent. Having finally broken the Lyon hegemony there's no way Bordeaux will be happy with anything less than another championship triumph and Blanc's comments surely have more to do with keeping the pressure off his own side than any genuine targets.

So is it possible Bordeaux could chalk up back-to-back league titles? Possible, yes; probable, maybe not.

Blanc still claims he doesn't have the financial muscle to compete with Marseille or Lyon, pointing to the fact that he lost linchpin central defender Souleymane Diawara to Marseille in the close season as proof positive that Bordeaux are punching above their weight. Then there is the likely departure of striker Marouane Chamakh to the Premier League to deal with.

> **"Blanc claims he doesn't have the financial muscle to compete with Marseille or Lyon...but the fact his squad hasn't been decimated suggests they have more teeth than he would have you believe"**

However, the fact Blanc's title-winning squad haven't been totally decimated suggests they have more teeth than he would have you believe. With Yoann Gourcuff definitively signed, former Monaco man Jaroslav Plasil in the ranks after two difficult years in Spain, and excellent Toulouse keeper Cedric Carrasso also on board, Bordeaux still look capable of giving the competition a serious run for their money – especially with question marks hanging over both Marseille and Lyon.

It's been chaos as usual at Marseille. Respected coach Eric Gerets packed his bags for the Middle East to be replaced by national icon Didier Deschamps, then omnipresent president Pape Diouf walked the plank after another public spat with owner Robert Louis-Dreyfus, who died of leukaemia at the age of 63, leaving the club in a state of flux.

The more things change, the more they stay the same at Marseille, who have always been a volatile club and probably always will be. For Deschamps to be able to settle the ship at the first time of asking and land the title – always L'OM's objective at the start of any campaign, no matter what state they're in – would be nothing short of miraculous. His new recruits (Diawara from Bordeaux, Edouard Cisse from Besiktas and Argentina's Lucho Gonzalez from Porto) seem sensible enough, but perhaps not inspired.

Encore?...Blanc is playing down title-repeat talk

Only top-notch Cameroon defender Stephane M'Bia, signed from Rennes, will really excite the Stade Velodrome faithful. There's talk of Galatasaray's Servet Cetin arriving to add some steel and speed to the back line, while giant Brazilian striker Brandao will be starting his first full season in France, but the odds are still against Marseille, though they should be there or thereabouts. The cups may offer a more realistic chance of silverware.

Puel criticised

But what of Lyon? We're still trying to get used to the idea – as, no doubt, is loquacious president Jean-Michel Aulas – of a French season kicking off without them being overwhelming favourites. Last season was a massive disappointment, with the team a mere shadow of the outfit that terrorised Europe's best a couple of seasons back, and manager Claude Puel was criticised for their dull and unadventurous style.

Aulas has kept faith with the former Lille boss, though, so now he has to deliver. Lyon have lost their two most influential players, Juninho and Karim Benzema, but could that be the jolt they need to re-invent themselves? Juninho was past his best and Benzema sparkled only in fits and

Gear change...Marseille's Diawara (left) gives no quarter to old Bordeaux team-mate Wendel in a pre-season friendly

starts last season. In their place come Argentina striker Lisandro Lopez from Porto for a club record £20.6million and Lille's Brazilian midfielder Michel Bastos, one of the standout performers in Ligue 1, with the brief of bringing back the glory days.

Make no mistake, the pressure is on. Aulas isn't known for his patience and he will expect championship glory – nothing else will do.

Promising youngsters

The likelihood is that the title will be fought out by these three clubs, with Toulouse and Paris Saint-Germain somewhere in the mix. Toulouse have lost classy defender Jeremy Mathieu to Valencia, but have a number of promising youngsters who will all be that little bit more experienced this term. PSG have a new coach, Antoine Kombouare, and have signed Sochaux's highly rated Turkey striker Mevlut Erding and veteran keeper Gregory Coupet, but it remains to be seen if they can mount a serious challenge.

Challenge...Deschamps must keep OM in touch

Elsewhere it's a warm hello again to Lens, one of the country's biggest clubs, who bounced back at the first time of asking after relegation. They are joined by Montpellier and the minnows of Boulogne at the expense of relegated Caen, Le Havre and Nantes. And it's also a fond farewell to much-loved striker Steve Savidan, who was just about to leave Caen for Monaco when a heart condition discovered during his medical forced him to quit the game at the age of 31. ●

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5 TO WATCH

Paris match...former national team keeper Coupet is back home to boost PSG's title bid

Impact player...Gignac

ANDRE-PIERRE GIGNAC

(Toulouse)
Last season's top marksman in France, Gignac has already been the subject of serious interest from Lyon. But whatever shirt he wears, expect the seriously physical 23-year-old to cause sparks to fly.

Expectations...Lucho Gonzalez

LUCHO GONZALEZ

(Marseille)
"We haven't seen a player of his calibre in Ligue 1 for a long time," said new Marseille coach Didier Deschamps after he had signed the Argentinian right-sided midfielder. No pressure there, then!

BRANDAO

(Marseille)
Standing 6ft 4in, and with the warrior mentality to match, the giant Brazilian striker added fire to the Marseille attack when he joined the

Warrior...Brandao

club from Shakhtar Donetsk in the middle of last season. His first full campaign in France should reap dividends for l'OM.

GREGORY COUPET

(Paris Saint-Germain)
Back in his homeland after an unhappy spell in Spain, can the veteran keeper give PSG a solid base from which to mount a title challenge?

Crunch time...Gourcuff

YOANN GOURCUFF

(Bordeaux)
Last season's standout player in the French league, this is the season when Gourcuff must kick on and consistently confirm his status as the undisputed governor of the domestic game.

NEW SEASON IN EUROPE

TEAM BY TEAM

Auxerre
Coach: Jean Fernandez
Key arrivals: Birsa (Sochaux), Licata (Monaco)
Key departures: Genest (Laval), Kahlenberg (Wolfsburg)
Prediction: Fernandez will have been quietly satisfied with eighth place last season and a club with such meagre resources should be more than happy with a similar result this time around.

Bordeaux
Coach: Laurent Blanc
Key arrivals: Carrasso (Toulouse), Gourcuff (Milan), Plasil (Osasuna)
Key departures: Diawara (Marseille), Esor (Arles), Obertan (Manchester United)
Prediction: The coach may be trying to playing down his side's chances, but with no obvious standout side in France this season Blanc will be setting his sights on retaining the title...even if he isn't prepared to admit it!

Boulogne
Coach: Laurent Guyot
Key arrivals: Adefemi (Rheindorf), Agouazi (Metz), Borne (Rennes), Da Rocha (Nantes)
Key departures: Devaux (Toulouse), Mouyokolo (Hull City)
Prediction: It's been a fairy-tale rise from obscurity to the top flight for little Boulogne, but you just can't help but feel that it all might turn into a horror story this season.

Grenoble
Coach: Mehmed Bazdarevic
Key arrivals: Matsui (Saint-Etienne), Tadic (Dinamo Zagreb), Viviani (Saint-Etienne)
Key departures: Kamissoko (Vannes), N'Ganga (Tours)
Prediction: It looks a season of consolidation for Grenoble after their mid-table finish last term. However, if they don't get off to a decent start they will struggle.

Le Mans
Coach: Paulo Duarte
Key arrivals: Bamba (SOA, Ivory Coast), Ovono (Dynamo Tbilisi)
Key departures: Pele (Toulouse)
Prediction: In a busy summer, they've lost talisman keeper Yohann Pele, gained a new coach and found themselves with a lot on their plate after the construction of a new stadium. It's hard to see any trees being torn up on the field.

Lens
Coach: Jean-Guy Wallemme
Key arrivals: Adoua (Wdada Casablanca), Eduardo (Guingamp), Kasraoui (Esperance)
Key departures: Pollet (Paris FC), Roux (Brest)
Prediction: One of France's traditional powerhouse clubs is back among the elite – and with a shrewd coach and fanatical support they shouldn't have too much trouble staying there.

Lille
Coach: Rudi Garcia
Key arrivals: Aubameyang (Milan), Landreau (PSG)
Key departures: Bastos (Lyon), Lebbihi (Zulte-Waregem), Tafforeau (Caen)
Prediction: There was a "will he go, won't he go?" moment with coach Garcia in the close season and it remains to be seen if that will destabilise a club that have also lost their best player, Bastos, to Lyon.

Lorient
Coach: Christian Gourcuff
Key arrivals: Baca (Le Havre), Diarra (Tours), Monterrubio (Sion), Mvuemba (Portsmouth)
Key departures: Jallet (PSG), Le Pen (Laval)
Prediction: Gourcuff did a fine job at little Lorient last season and with a couple of older heads in the camp this time around he should do just as well again.

Lyon
Coach: Claude Puel
Key arrivals: Bastos (Lille), Lisandro Lopez (Porto)
Key departures: Benzema (Real Madrid), Juninho (Al Gharafa), Keita (Galatasaray)
Prediction: Lyon go into the season with more question marks over them than at any time in recent history. Sure they'll finish in the top three, but the league title is by no means a certainty.

Marseille
Coach: Didier Deschamps
Key arrivals: M'Bia (Rennes), E Cisse (Besiktas), Diawara (Bordeaux), Lucho Gonzalez (Porto)
Key departures: D Cisse (Panathinaikos), Civelli (released), Givet (Blackburn), Wiltord (released), Zenden (released), Ziani (Wolfsburg), Zubar (Wolves)
Prediction: Deschamps had success as a player at l'OM, but it may take more than a season to bring the league title back to the south coast.

Monaco
Coach: Guy Lacombe
Key arrivals: Puygrenier (Zenit), Traore (Portsmouth)
Key departures: Licata (Auxerre), Meriem (released)
Prediction: Monaco have changed coaches and the pragmatic Lacombe will want his side to be much tougher to beat and more consistent than they were in the last campaign. They should improve, but perhaps not by much.

Montpellier
Coach: Rene Girard
Key arrivals: Dernis (Saint-Etienne), Jeunechamp (Nice), Pitau (Sochaux), Spahic (Lokomotiv Moscow)
Key departures: Lippini (released), Ouadah (released)
Prediction: There's plenty of passion in Montpellier and the club has seriously underachieved in recent times. They just need to avoid the drop in this first season after promotion and build from there.

Nancy
Coach: Pablo Correa
Key arrivals: Alo'o (Angers), Ca (Nantes), Efoulou (Angers), Lemaitre (Caen)
Key departures: Biancalani (released), Fortune (Celtic), N'Guemo (Celtic)
Prediction: After looking like a team for the future Nancy blew up badly last season. But coach Correa is highly respected and can expect better than a 15th-place finish this time.

Nice
Coach: Didier Olle-Nicolle
Key arrivals: Mabiala (PSG), Pote (Clermont), Quartey (Kaizer Chiefs)
Key departures: Hognon (released), Jeunechamp (Montpellier), Kante (Panathinaikos)
Prediction: Nice finished an impressive ninth last season, but have changed coaches in the close season. This could have an impact, but hopefully not a catastrophic one.

Paris Saint-Germain
Coach: Antoine Kombouare
Key arrivals: Coupet (Atletico Madrid), Erding (Sochaux), Grondin (Valenciennes)
Key departures: Landreau (Lille), Mabiala (Nice), Mulumbu (West Brom), Pancrate (released)
Prediction: PSG finished sixth last term and, with a new coach in the hot seat, the pressure will be on to improve. They should do, but not by much.

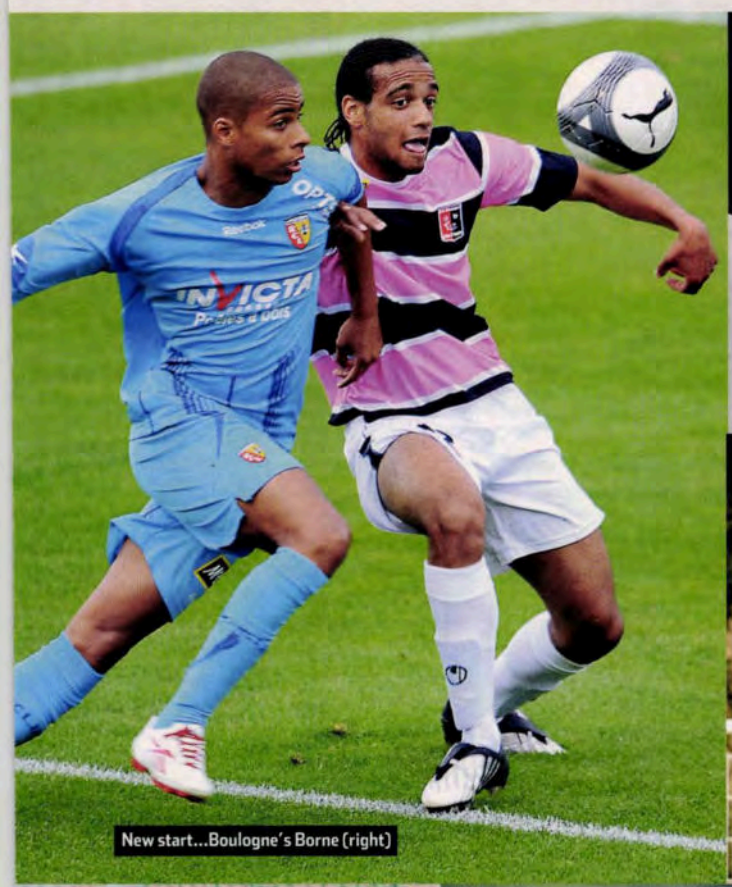
Rennes
Coach: Frederic Antonetti
Key arrivals: Bangoura (Dynamo Kyiv), Doumbia (Chateauroux), Inamoto (Eintracht Frankfurt)
Key departures: Borne (Boulogne), Louhoungou (Mlada Boleslav), M'Bia (Marseilles), Sorlin (PAOK Salonica)
Prediction: New coach Antonetti arrives in the north from Nice looking to push his new charges up into the top four contenders. It might not happen this season, though.

Saint-Etienne
Coach: Alain Perrin
Key arrivals: Fernandes (Manchester City), Plante (Caen), Sako (Chateauroux)
Key departures: Dernis (Montpellier), Matsui (Grenoble), Viviani (Grenoble)
Prediction: Having avoided relegation by the skin of their teeth last season, *les Verts* should do better this time out – but they are still a long way from being any sort of threat at the top of the table.

Sochaux
Coach: Francis Gillot
Key arrivals: Brechet (PSV), Davies (Hammarby), Enza-Yamissi (Nimes), Stevanovic (Partizan Belgrade)
Key departures: Erding (PSG), Isabey (Dijon), Mezague (Vannes), Pitau (Montpellier)
Prediction: They've lost their best player, Mevlut Erding to Paris Saint-Germain, so it's hard to see anything but mediocrity this season.

Toulouse
Coach: Alain Casanova
Key arrivals: Luan (Sao Caetano), Machado (Porto), Nounkeu (Pau), Pele (Le Mans)
Key departures: Bergougnoux (released), Carrasso (Bordeaux), Mathieu (Valencia)
Prediction: Casanova has worked wonders during his time at Toulouse and, with a bit of luck, they could cause a few shocks again this season.

Valenciennes
Coach: Philippe Montanier
Key arrivals: Ben Khalfallah (Caen), Cohade (Strasbourg), Tae-hee (Reading)
Key departures: Belmadi (released), Darcheville (released), Grondin (PSG)
Prediction: New boss Montanier will want survival first and foremost. Anything else will be a bonus.


New start...Boulogne's Borne (right)

Hot shot...Lisandro

Lens' hope...Eduardo (right)

PSG boss...Kombouare

Bordeaux No1...Carrasso

Off and running...Rennes' Inamoto

New challenge...Edouard Cisse of l'OM

Garcia's man...Landreau

Badge of honour...Matsui

Nancy boy...Efoulou

Waiting to pounce

Bayern Munich start the new Bundesliga campaign as favourites but, says Nick Bidwell, a host of clubs are ready to take advantage if Louis Van Gaal's side slip up

IN A SUMMER when many of the Bundesliga's leading lights have opted for a change of coach, what happens pre-season might go a long way to determining the identity of the next champions.

For incoming bosses such as Louis Van Gaal (Bayern Munich), Felix Magath (Schalke), Armin Veh (Wolfsburg), Bruno Labbadia (Hamburg) and Jupp Heynckes (Leverkusen) time is uncomfortably tight. With just five or six weeks to find their bearings, lay down the law, sift the playing gold from the base metal and work on tactical variations, it is no job for the faint-hearted.

Each of these sideline supremos has his priority of priorities. The veteran Heynckes, previously at the helm of, among others, Bayern and Real Madrid, has to find a way to add consistency to a talented, but fitful, young Leverkusen side. After a turbulent off-season at Hamburg – marked by coach Martin Jol and technical director Dietmar Beiersdorfer's resignations – Labbadia yearns for stability but needs a good start to quell fans' unrest.

> **"If anyone can work a miracle in the Ruhr it is 'Felix Almighty', a man who is unashamed to rule by fear"**

As for Magath, who sensationally led Wolfsburg to their first league title in May, he will aim to re-acquaint the notoriously self-absorbed figures in the Schalke dressing room with the concept of "team first". Magath has far less money available to him than at Wolfsburg as Schalke are heavily in debt and barely have a transfer budget worthy of the name. But if anyone can work a miracle in the Ruhr it is "Felix Almighty", a man unashamed to rule by fear.

New Wolfsburg coach Veh is under no illusion how difficult it will be to keep the VW-backed club on top. He guided Stuttgart to a surprise title win in 2007, only for it to turn sour very quickly indeed. Although history tells us that provincial title winners tend to fade away as quickly as they rise, Veh has good cause to think Wolfsburg might be the exception to the rule.

Magath's intelligently-assembled squad remain intact and all those who bemoan player power must have been heartened by Wolfsburg's refusal to play ball when Milan made a £30m offer for Bosnia striker Edin Dzeko. The latter was keen to go, but was told in no uncertain terms that he would have to respect his contract. Unusually – and it's worth underlining – Dzeko accepted the decision with good grace.

Returning Bayern to their default position on top of the Bundesliga is the first and last item on Van Gaal's agenda. The appointment of the ex-Ajax, Barcelona, AZ Alkmaar and Holland boss was a logical one. Under his predecessor Jurgen Klinsmann, Bayern were, for the most part, an organisational and tactical shambles. In contrast, the Dutchman is well known for producing finely tuned teams, characterised by disciplined shape and set patterns of play.

But Van Gaal teams are not created overnight. They require a lot of time and effort on the training ground, time which Bayern may not have.

And who to pick? Not only has Van Gaal inherited a extended troupe of internationals, the Bayern remedy after any disappointing season has always been to splash the cash, and this summer they have spent £50m on Stuttgart striker Mario Gomez, Ukraine defensive midfielder Anatoliy

Man-management test...Van Gaal

New season, new challenges...(clockwise, from above) Jupp Heynckes, Felix Magath, Bruno Labbadia and Armin Veh

Tymoshchuk, Croat wide man Danijel Pranjic and Dutch defender Edson Braafheid, not to mention the high wages of a pair of Bosman frees: Croatia striker Ivica Olic and Gladbach playmaker Alex Baumjohann.

First-team berths will not come cheap and it will be fascinating to see how the redundant react. Van Gaal's grasp of man-management will definitely be tested. He has a reputation for preferring youngsters to star names – "He only wants robots who obey him," Johan Cruyff scathingly once said – and one commodity Bayern are not short of is A-listers with loud, militant voices.

Sheer unpredictability

Bundesliga attendances have boomed in the new millennium, with average gates nearly 42,000 last term, and one reason is the sheer unpredictability of the elite. Every other year the title race goes to the wire and last season no fewer than six teams were involved in the shake-up.

Over the next nine months the field of championship hopefuls could conceivably be wider still. Bremen will be itching to bounce back strongly after a mediocre last term; Hoffenheim, whose coach Ralf Rangnick aims to disprove the theory that the longer he stays at a club the worse results get, have bought well in Argentinian midfielder Franco Zuculini and Brazilian striker Maicosuel; while Hertha Berlin's Lucien Favre is a past master at turning supposed off-the-rack players into a haute couture team.

Under the innovative aegis of Jurgen Klopp, Dortmund have taken a great leap forward, while Stuttgart – provided they can adequately replace Gomez – should have their sights trained on the summit too. Even Koln, only mid-table last term, fancy their chances, their ambition heightened by prodigal son Lukas Podolski's return.

Bayern, vastly superior to the rest in economic power and talent, will always be favourites. But if the Bavarians slip – and they are not infallible – expect a stampede to jump into the breach. ●

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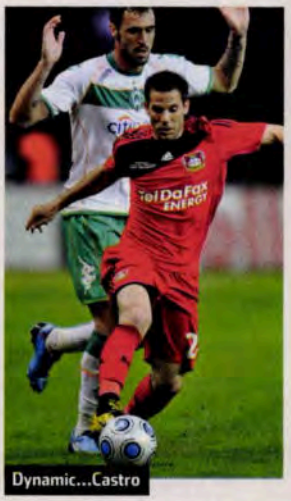

Dynamic...Castro

All bases covered...Enke

GONZALO CASTRO
(Leverkusen)
One of the most prominent members of the Germany Under-21 side that became European champions, the dynamic right-back or right-sided midfielder stands on the eve of a potentially career-defining season. If he maintains the progress of the past couple of years, he could be flying to South Africa for the World Cup.

ROBERT ENKE
(Hannover)
The best keeper in the Bundesliga at the moment. Unflappable, brave and with all the technical bases covered, he should be Germany's World Cup keeper – but he will have to stay on his toes thanks to the intense competition generated by Tim Wiese (Bremen), Manuel Neuer (Schalke) and Rene Adler (Leverkusen).

Mr Goals...Gomez

MARIO GOMEZ
(Bayern Munich)
"Super Mario" has still to flower at international level, but in the Bundesliga he means goals, goals and more goals (with 79 in the last three seasons at Stuttgart). So keen were Bayern to bring in his power, mobility and opportunism that they happily shelled out a record domestic transfer fee of £30m.

Unpredictable...Ziani

KARIM ZIANI
(Wolfsburg)
The champions picked up a bargain when they paid Marseille £4.5m for the little Algerian dribbler who was rather surprisingly declared surplus to requirements by Didier Deschamps, the new coach at the Provencal outfit. Able to play on either flank, Ziani takes some stopping once he gets into his stride and will give his new team a large dose of flair.

Maradona's a fan...Zuculini

FRANCO ZUCULINI
(Hoffenheim)
Much of Hoffenheim's rise and rise has been down to their Brazilian imports. Now they are going Argentinian, spending £4m on this highly promising 18-year-old defensive midfielder from Racing Club who has already forced his way into Diego Maradona's full international side.

TEAM BY TEAM

Bayer Leverkusen
Coach: Jupp Heynckes
Key arrivals: Derdiyok (Basle), Hyypia (Liverpool), Schwaab (Freiburg)
Key departures: Djakpa (Hannover), Haggui (Hannover), Henrique (Barcelona), Schneider (retired)
Prediction: A team packed with youthful ability inexplicably went from third to ninth in the second half of last season and the first priority of new boss Heynckes will be to find a way to make them more resilient. Even in the absence of injured top scorer Patrick Helmes, they should have enough for European qualification.

Bayern Munich
Coach: Louis Van Gaal
Key arrivals: Baumjohann (Gladbach), Braafheid (Twente), Gomez (Stuttgart), Olic (Hamburg), Pranjic (Heerenveen), Tymoschuk (Zenit)
Key departures: Lucio (Inter), Oddo (Milan), Podolski (Koln), Sagnol (retired), Ze Roberto (Hamburg)
Prediction: Whether star French creator Franck Ribery leaves or not, Bayern still have the strongest, most talented squad in the country and logically should be odds-on for a 21st title. But all is not lost for the rest of the league. With so many recruits to bed in, and the intricate tactical lines of new coach Van Gaal to learn, Bayern are very much a building site at the moment.

Bochum
Coach: Marcel Koller
Key arrivals: Dedic (Frosinone), Johansson (Halmstads)
Key departures: Ilicevic (Kaiserslautern), Mieciel (Legia Warsaw)
Prediction: Too many players are past their best, including veteran Argentinian striker Diego Klimowicz and former international Paul Freier. Do they have enough firepower to stay up? Probably not.

Borussia Dortmund
Coach: Jurgen Klopp
Key arrivals: Bender (1860 Munich), Feulner (Mainz), Rangelov (Energie Cottbus)
Key departures: Lee (Al Hilal), Frei (Basle)
Prediction: Slowly but surely the Dortmunder are finding their feet again after a number of barren financial and sporting years. Given their many exciting young prospects – especially defenders Mats Hummels, Neven Subotic and Felipe Santana – a higher finish must be on the cards.

Eintracht Frankfurt
Coach: Michael Skibbe
Key arrivals: Fahrmann (Schalke), Franz (Karlsruhe), Teber (Hoffenheim)
Key departures: Fink (Besiktas), Inamoto (Rennes)
Prediction: One of the worst teams in the second half of last season, the Frankfurter often seemed inhibited at home. The arrival of two gutsy leaders in centre-back Maik Franz and midfielder Selim Teber should keep them out of harm's way.

Freiburg
Coach: Robin Dutt
Key arrivals: Cha (Koblenz), Makiadi (Wolfsburg), Mujdza (Zagreb), Reisinger (Furth)
Key departures: Schlitte (Rostock), Schwaab (Leverkusen)
Prediction: Back in the top flight for the first time in four years, they will have to tone down their all-or-nothing attacking style or else be picked off on the counter.

Hamburg
Coach: Bruno Labbadia
Key arrivals: Berg (Groningen), Elia (Twente), Tesche (Bielefeld), Ze Roberto (Bayern)
Key Departures: Gravgaard (Nantes), Olic (Bayern)
Prediction: They clearly lack dug-out stability – Labbadia is their sixth coach in as many years – but a top-five finish is a possibility. Sweden Under-21 striker Marcus Berg is the club's record signing.

Hannover
Coach: Dieter Hecking
Key arrivals: Djakpa (Leverkusen), Haggui (Leverkusen)
Key departures: Fahrenhorst (Duisburg), Ismael (retired), Tarnat (retired)
Prediction: Since winning promotion to the Bundesliga in 2002, they have been perennial mid-table occupants and more of the same is likely.

Hertha Berlin
Coach: Lucien Favre
Key arrivals: Janker (Hoffenheim), Wichniarek (Bielefeld)
Key departures: Pantelic (out of contract), Simunic (Hoffenheim), Voronin (Liverpool)
Prediction: With money too tight to mention Hertha seem unlikely to repeat their fourth-place finish of last season. Yet Favre is in his element producing gritty, hard-to-beat sides on a shoestring, and if Polish striker Artur Wichniarek – back in the capital for a second spell – gets among the goals, Hertha could overachieve again.

Hoffenheim
Coach: Ralf Rangnick
Key arrivals: Eichner (Karlsruhe), Maicosuel (Botafogo), Simunic (Hertha Berlin), Tagoe (Al Ettifaq), Zuculini (Racing Club)
Key departures: Janker (Hertha), Teber (Eintracht Frankfurt)
Prediction: Despite fading fast in the second part of last season, the south-westerners can regroup even stronger. They will have learned a lot from their inaugural Bundesliga campaign, while prolific striker Vedad Ibisevic is fit again and his partner Demba Ba has opted to stay after flirting with the idea of a move to Stuttgart.

Koln
Coach: Zvonimir Soldo
Key arrivals: Freis (Karlsruhe), Podolski (Bayern), Maniche (Atletico Madrid)
Key departures: Broich (Nurnberg), Radu (Wolfsburg), Scherz (retired)
Prediction: Although Soldo is a coaching rookie, European qualification is far from out of the question. They already boast a steely back line built around Brazilian central defender Pedro Geromel and it will be a major shock if Lukas Podolski does not mark his return with an explosion of goals.

Mainz
Coach: Jorn Andersen
Key arrivals: Hamza (Zamalek), Muller (Barnsley), Polanski (Getafe), Trojan (St Pauli), Ivanschitz (Panathinaikos)
Key departures: Feulner (Dortmund)
Prediction: Apart from the run-in, when they won five out of six games to seal promotion, they were so-so for much of last term and this cannot augur well for their survival.

Monchengladbach
Coach: Michael Frontzeck
Key arrivals: Bobadilla (Grasshopper), Marx (Bielefeld), Meeuwis (Roda)
Key departures: Baumjohann (Bayern), Galasek (retired), Marin (Werder Bremen)
Prediction: After a magnificent post-Christmas effort to avoid the drop, the signs are that they could be in for another rearguard action. Much of their creativity went with Marin and Baumjohann, and the record of new coach Frontzeck (relegated with Aachen and Bielefeld) does not inspire confidence.

Nurnberg
Coach: Michael Oenning
Key arrivals: Broich (Koln)
Key departures: Reinartz (Leverkusen)
Prediction: Play-off winners, their chances of steering clear of the relegation spots look bright. They have plenty of top-flight experience on board, particularly goalscoring midfielder Marek Mintal.

Schalke
Coach: Felix Magath
Key arrivals: Holtby (Aachen), Moravek (Bohemians 1905), Pliatsikas (AEK Athens)
Key departures: Engelaar (PSV), Fahrmann (Eintracht), Krstajic (Partizan Belgrade)
Prediction: Hopes are high that Magath can forge another title-winning team after Bayern and Wolfsburg. But he does not have nearly enough strength in depth and strikers Kevin Kuranyi, Jefferson Farfan and Halil Altintop need to be sharper in front of goal. A place in the top four is far more likely than the title.

Stuttgart
Coach: Markus Babbel
Key arrivals: Celozzi (Karlsruhe)
Key departures: Gomez (Bayern)
Prediction: Another Champions League spot may be asking too much without the goals of Gomez. On the plus side, they have a batch of brilliant youngsters, such as Christian Trasch and Serdar Tasci.

Werder Bremen
Coach: Thomas Schaaf
Key arrivals: Marin (Gladbach), Moreno (Shakhtar Donetsk)
Key departures: Baumann (retired), Diego (Juventus)
Prediction: Even without Diego, Werder can and must improve on 10th place last season. But new attacking midfield duo of Mesut Ozil and Marko Marin need to hit the ground running and Per Mertesacker must steer clear of injury.

Wolfsburg
Coach: Armin Veh
Key arrivals: Johnson (Munich 1860), Kahlenberg (Auxerre), Ziani (Marseille)
Key Departures: Makiadi (Freiburg), Okubo (Vissel Kobe)
Prediction: While a successful title defence would be verging on the utopian, the fall should not be too dramatic – perhaps just two or three places. Vitally, they have not lost a single first-teamer and they have bought intelligently.

Exciting prospect...Dortmund's Mats Hummels

Top import...Bayern's Anatoliy Tymoschuk

Gladbach boss...Frontzek

Frankfurt boys ...Skibbe (second left) and new intake

Happy to be home...Podolski

Newcomers...Mintal's goals and experience will be vital to Nurnberg

Only way is up...Schalke's Altintop

Stuttgart starlet...Tasci (right)

Hertha goal hope...Wichniarek

Past masters

Italian football risks becoming stuck in a time warp, unwilling to drop veteran stars and unable to blood new talent, says Paddy Agnew

Old guard...is it time for Andrea Pirlo and Luca Toni (left and right) to make way for some young blood?

WHAT DO the following have in common: keeper Vincenzo Fiorillo (Sampdoria), full-back Francesco Renzetti (Genoa), centre-half Giuseppe Bellusci (Catania), midfielders Fabio Sciacca (Catania) and Andrea Poli (Sampdoria), and strikers Abel Hernandez (Palermo), Guido Marilungo (Sampdoria) and Alberto Paloschi (Parma)?

Well, apart from being under-20, these multinational young talents will all struggle to hold down a permanent Serie A starting place next season.

The examples of players such as striker Mario Balotelli and defender Davide Santon (both of Inter), Brazilian star Pato (Milan) and Montenegrin midfielder Stevan Jovetic (Fiorentina) are the exceptions that prove the rule. They too are under-20, but they are such prodigious talents that they have – albeit intermittently – already played their way into their first teams. For the rest, it may well be a long, difficult season.

Italy's Under-21 coach, Pierluigi Casiraghi, says that Italian youngsters should follow the example of Manchester United's Federico Macheda and move abroad, adding: "In theory, with the money crisis, there is more space for young players now compared to four or five years ago. Yet, in Serie A, results are everything. If you are not winning, then [the coach] can't pick an Under-21 player."

As we prepare for the curtain to lift on another new Serie A season – it starts on August 23 and ends on May 16, 2010 – it is tempting to conclude that the Italian football world is still facing many familiar problems, including not just lack of time and space for youngsters but also issues such as financial insolvency and potential fan violence. As we go into the season which will see the reigning world champions defend their title in South Africa, Italian football sometimes seems ever more fossilised.

It seems emblematic that two of the greatest talents in Italian football, Zlatan Ibrahimovic of Inter and Kaka of Milan, have packed their bags and left for Spain. The days when Italy was the "Hollywood" of world football would seem to be long gone.

While Kaka and Ibrahimovic head off, Italian football risks becoming stuck in a time warp, renewing the contracts of golden oldies like Alessandro Del Piero, who is 35 in November, and Francesco Totti, 33 in September, but almost certainly not devoting enough time and energy to under-age players.

> **"The rebuilding of the national team is ongoing – I never said that it was finished or that we would go to the World Cup finals with these players"**
>
> *Marcello Lippi*

More disappointing

Nor do the results of last season paint a rosy picture. It was bad enough that not a single Italian club made the quarter-finals of the Champions League, but in some ways it was even more disappointing that Casiraghi's useful Under-21 side went out to Germany at the semi-final stages of the European Championship in Sweden in June. After all, Italian teams have won five of the last 10 Under-21 titles.

Arguably worst of all, however, was Italy's disappointing Confederations Cup showing in South Africa, where Marcello Lippi's men struggled to beat USA 3-1 before losing 1-0 to Egypt and 3-0 to Brazil. Did that showing suggest that a number of Lippi's World Cup winners are at the end of the line?

Certainly, in the immediate aftermath of an embarrassingly poor showing, Lippi seemed to suggest that he would ring the changes by way of preparation for next year's World Cup finals. Conceding that Italy's showing in the Confederations Cup represented just about the "lowest moment" in his three years as national team coach, he said: "We've taken a right box on the ears and now we're on the plane home. But the rebuilding of the

national team is ongoing. I never said that it was finished or that we would go to the World Cup finals with these players. We'll start the changes shortly, beginning with those Under-21 players who have already proved themselves."

In the all-important third game against Brazil, Italy started with eight players who featured in the Germany 2006 World Cup-winning squad. Yet Zambrotta, Cannavaro, Gattuso, Grosso, Pirlo, Camoranesi, Toni and Iaquinta all performed some way short of their 2006 best in a game in which the Brazilians seemed stronger, faster, fresher and fitter, not to mention more skilful.

Perhaps, after all, youth will in the end gets its head. Will there be space this winter in the national team for such as Santon and Balotelli? Will other younger players such as Sampdoria striker Giampaolo Pazzini, Udinese midfielder Gaetano D'Agostino, Roma midfielder Matteo Brighi, Roma defender Marco Motta, Juventus midfielder Paolo De Ceglie, Atalanta striker Robert Acquafresca and Juventus front man Sebastian Giovinco get an international run out?

Stand by for experiments in August when Italy meet Switzerland in a friendly, prior to September World Cup qualifiers against Georgia and Bulgaria.

As if things were not bad enough in these cash-strapped times (when it is estimated that Italy's Serie A clubs have collective debts approaching £2billion), there are good reasons to worry that the new season could be marked by fan problems.

In mid-July a court in Arezzo handed out a six-year sentence to Luigi Spaccarotella, the policeman who (accidentally or otherwise) shot and killed Lazio fan Gabriele Sandri at a motorway cafe in November 2007 during scuffles between Lazio and Juventus fans.

Many Lazio fans protested that the sentence was too lenient (given appeals and his service record, it is highly possible that Spaccarottella will not do a day in jail), prompting violent disturbances in Rome. Police and football authorities cannot rule out further violence. ●

5 TO WATCH

Fit again...Borriello

National exposure...Consigli

MARCO BORRIELLO
(Milan)
Scorer of 19 goals for Genoa two seasons ago, he had a miserable, injury-interrupted season last term which saw him score just once in seven Serie A appearances for Milan. Likely to push "old man" Pippo Inzaghi hard for a spot up front alongside the Brazilians, Ronaldinho and Pato.

Big-money move...Diego

DIEGO
(Juventus)
At £21million from Werder Bremen, the Brazilian playmaker was the most expensive signing of the close season in Italy. His creativity and spectacular goals will liven up a workmanlike Juve.

ROBERT ACQUAFRESCA
(Atalanta)
Scorer of 14 goals for Cagliari last season and yet another of the "new wave" who can be expected to rattle cages in Serie A – all the more so since he will get plenty of action at Atalanta.

Young star...Acquafresca

ANDREA CONSIGLI
(Atalanta)
Capped at every level for Italy from Under-16 to Under-21 and including Italy's Beijing Olympics team, he just might make the South Africa World Cup squad, if only for the experience.

MARIO BALOTELLI
(Internazionale)
He might only be 19-years-old, but Balotelli is already heading into his third season as a regular first-team member at Inter. Yet another of those who will be under close surveillance from national boss Marcello Lippi as South Africa approaches.

National service...Balotelli

TEAM BY TEAM

Atalanta
Coach: Angelo Gregucci
Key arrivals: Acquafresca (Cagliari)
Key departures: Floccari (Genoa)
Prediction: As always, Serie A survival will be the priority. With striker Robert Acquafresca replacing Sergio Floccari, this should not prove beyond them.

Bari
Coach: Giampiero Ventura
Key arrivals: Alvarez (Pisa), Langella (Chievo), Paro (Genoa)
Key departures: none
Prediction: Back in Serie A after an eight-year absence, last season's Serie B champions might be destined for a quick return to the lower division given their limited squad and the fact promotion-winning coach Antonio Conte was replaced by Ventura.

Bologna
Coach: Giuseppe Papadopulo
Key arrivals: Guana (Palermo), Tedesco (Catania), Viviano (Brescia)
Key departures: Volpi (Reggina)
Prediction: Having narrowly hung on last term, better things will be expected from a side still featuring striker Marco Di Vaio.

Cagliari
Coach: Massimo Allegri
Key arrivals: Nene (Nacional Madeira)
Key departures: Acquafresca (Atalanta)
Prediction: Last season's ninth place represented excellent coaching by Allegri. With a little-changed squad, he will do well to repeat himself this year.

Catania
Coach: Gianluca Atzori
Key arrivals: Barrientos (FC Moscow), Delvecchio (Sampdoria)
Key departures: Bizzarri (Lazio)
Prediction: Survival will be the order of the day for the Sicilian club. Last season's coach Zenga has moved on to Palermo, being replaced by former assistant Atzori.

Chievo
Coach: Domenico Di Carlo
Key arrivals: Ariatti (Lecce), Granoche (Triestina), Oliveira (Cittadella)
Key departures: Langella (Bari)
Prediction: The Flying Donkies were involved in the relegation scrap right up to the second-last day of last season. Even though they still have striker Sergio Pelissier, they look like candidates for that same relegation battle.

Fiorentina
Coach: Cesare Prandelli
Key arrivals: Castillo (Lecce), Marchionni (Juventus), Natali (Torino)
Key departures: Felipe Melo (Juventus)
Prediction: The Champions League will again weigh heavily and Felipe Melo will be a huge loss for a side still relying heavily on Alberto Gilardino in attack.

Genoa
Coach: Gian Piero Gasperini
Key arrivals: Bolzoni (Inter), Crespo (Inter), Floccari (Atalanta), Paro (Bari), Tomovic (Red Star)
Key departures: Ferrari (Besiktas), Milito (Inter), Thiago Motta (Inter)
Prediction: Having lost both Argentinian striker Diego Milito and Brazilian midfielder Thiago Motta to Inter during the summer, Genoa look distinctly weaker than the side that managed to finish fifth last season.

Internazionale
Coach: Jose Mourinho
Key arrivals: Lucio (Bayern Munich), Milito (Genoa), Thiago Motta (Genoa)
Key departures: Bolzoni (Genoa), Crespo (Genoa), Cruz (released), Figo (released), Jimenez (West Ham), Maxwell (Barcelona)
Prediction: Owner Massimo Moratti wants the Champions League as well as another Serie A title this season. With the "Special One" still on the bench – and reinforcements such as Diego Milito, Thiago Motta and Lucio – all is possible for the reigning champions...even before the impending trade-off of Zlatan Ibrahimovic for Barcelona's Samuel Eto'o.

Juventus
Coach: Ciro Ferrara
Key arrivals: Cannavaro (Real Madrid), Diego (Werder Bremen), Felipe Melo (Fiorentina)
Key departures: Marchionni (Fiorentina), Mellberg (Olympiakos), Nedved (retired)
Prediction: Many argue that Juventus have done best of all the Serie A clubs on the transfer market – Brazilians Diego and Felipe Melo, not to mention returning veteran Fabio Cannavaro. All look like good buys for a side that will have a "new" coach in Ferrara. As always, they will not sell their hides cheaply.

Lazio
Coach: Davide Ballardini
Key arrivals: Bizzarri (Catania), Eliseu (Malaga)
Key departures: Carrizo (Zaragoza)
Prediction: With a new coach in Ballardini, and with striker Goran Pandev, midfielder Cristian Ledesma and defender Lorenzo De Silvestri all keen to move, the Italian Cup holders are in a state of transition. Good news, though, is that Argentinian striker Mauro Zarate still leads the attack.

Livorno
Coach: Gennaro Ruotolo
Key arrivals: Knezevic (Juventus), Lucarelli (Parma), Pieri (Sampdoria)
Key departures: Grandoni (Parma)
Prediction: Immediately back up after just one season in Serie B, Livorno return with charismatic local hero Cristiano Lucarelli again leading the attack. Coach Ruotolo, who does not have a full Serie A licence, will have his work cut out.

Milan
Coach: Leonardo
Key arrivals: Onyewu (Standard Liege), Thiago Silva (Fluminense)
Key departures: Kaka (Real Madrid), Maldini (retired)
Prediction: All change at Milanello with no Carlo Ancelotti, no Kaka and no Paolo Maldini. This is "sink-or-swim" time for two key Brazilians: relatively inexperienced coach Leonardo and forgotten genius Ronaldinho. A sustained Champions League run and a serious Serie A challenge are no longer optional.

Napoli
Coach: Roberto Donadoni
Key arrivals: Campagnaro (Sampdoria), Cigarini (Atalanta), De Sanctis (Sevilla), Quagliarello (Udinese), Zuniga (Siena)
Key departures: Mannini (Sampdoria)
Prediction: Napoli look to have done well in the summer transfer market, with striker Fabio Quagliarello, midfielder Luca Cigarini, Argentinian defender Hugo Campagnaro and Colombian midfielder Juan Zuniga all appearing to be very good acquisitions. Will be able to take points from everybody.

Palermo
Coach: Walter Zenga
Key arrivals: Bertolo (Banfield), Pastore (Huracan)
Key departures: Guana (Bologna), Savini (PAOK)
Prediction: Ex-Catania coach Zenga steps into the hot seat with lofty ambitions, given that he has somewhat provocatively dared to talk of winning the title. In realistic terms, he will be pleased with a Europa League finish.

Parma
Coach: Francesco Guidolin
Key arrivals: Biabiany (Modena), Galloppa (Siena), Grandoni (Livorno)
Key departures: Lucarelli (Livorno)
Prediction: Back in Serie A after a season in Serie B, they should be able to achieve their only realistic objective: namely survival. Have picked up an interesting player in midfielder Daniele Galloppa.

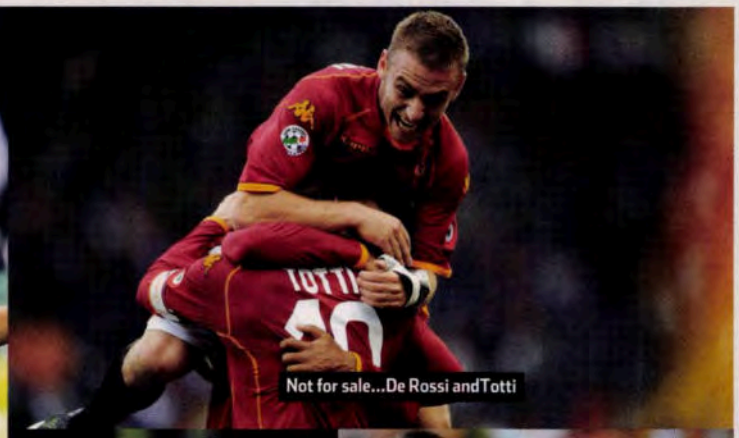
Roma
Coach: Luciano Spalletti
Key arrivals: Guberti (Ascoli)
Key departures: Montella (retired), Panucci (released)
Prediction: No Serie A club starts the season surrounded by as much uncertainty as Roma with Italpetroli, the Sensi family's holding company, over £300million in debt. All the club's players bar Francesco Totti and Daniele De Rossi are currently for sale. Watch this space.

Sampdoria
Coach: Luigi Del Neri
Key arrivals: Mannini (Napoli)
Key departures: Campagnaro (Napoli), Delvecchio (Catania), Pieri (Livorno)
Prediction: With a new coach in Del Neri, enfant terrible Antonio Cassano still there to run the show and Giampaolo Pazzini to lead the attack, Sampdoria are sure to cause problems.

Siena
Coach: Marco Giampaolo
Key arrivals: Reginaldo (Parma)
Key departures: Galloppa (Parma)
Prediction: Serie A survival will be the obvious objective for a workmanlike team that now features the Brazilian, Reginaldo, in attack.

Udinese
Coach: Pasquale Marino
Key arrivals: Corradi (Reggina), Orellana (Audax Italiano), Romo (Llaneros)
Key departures: Quagliarello (Napoli)
Prediction: Seventh last season, Udinese will do well to finish higher this time given the loss of striker Fabio Quagliarello and, probably, midfielder Gaetano D'Agostino.

Causing problems...Cassano


Not for sale...De Rossi andTotti

Viola attack...Gilardino

Boys from Brazil...Thiago Silva and Leonardo (left and right)

Back at the back...Cannavaro

Big ideas...Zenga

Hot shot...Milito

Staying put...Zarate

Goal machine...Di Vaio

Interesting...Galloppa

Top Dogs

La Liga is Europe's most attractive league once more, says Sid Lowe

EVEN THE proudest of Spaniards had to accept defeat; even the most enthusiastic La Liga cheerleaders were forced to pack away their pompoms. The warm glow of the European Championship success still endured – but the national team was one thing, the nation's teams quite another. The line-up for the 2008-09 Champions League semi-finals brought Spain crashing back down to earth.

For the third successive year, three of the four teams competing for a place in the Final were English. In three years, Spanish teams had occupied just two semi-final slots, compared to the Premier League's nine.

Atletico Madrid had been knocked out by Porto and Arsenal had dispatched Villarreal 4-1. Real Madrid president Vicente Boluda then boasted that his side would "dick on" Liverpool – only for the opposite to happen. There were no complaints, no buts, no what-ifs. There was just sad resignation. It was the fifth consecutive year that Real Madrid had failed to win a knockout tie.

And yet the same Madrid side that had been hammered 5-0 on aggregate by Liverpool had won nine successive games in La Liga – a run that would become 17 wins and a single draw in 18 matches. So what did that say about La Liga?

Only Barcelona remained, and the optimism their wonderful football sparked was overshadowed by a creeping pessimism. Or, some insisted, realism.

It was one thing performing brilliantly in Spain but, as *El Pais* newspaper put it, "Europe is something completely different". The fear was that dazzling domestically was a little too easy. Barcelona had not faced an English club yet. Now they would, their adventure would draw to a close as Chelsea awaited.

Even after Barca squeezed past Chelsea and into the Final, most believed Spanish football would end up empty-handed. After all, they had been fortunate to scrape through the semi-final. It wasn't just Britain's myopic media, salivating in jingoistic indignation, saying that Manchester United would win a second European title. The Premier League's superiority was incontrovertible. No wonder everyone was tuning into English football and turning off La Liga. No wonder there was depression in Spain.

But not any more.

> **"Treble-winning Barcelona, the finest team on the planet, are now up against the most exciting players on the planet"**

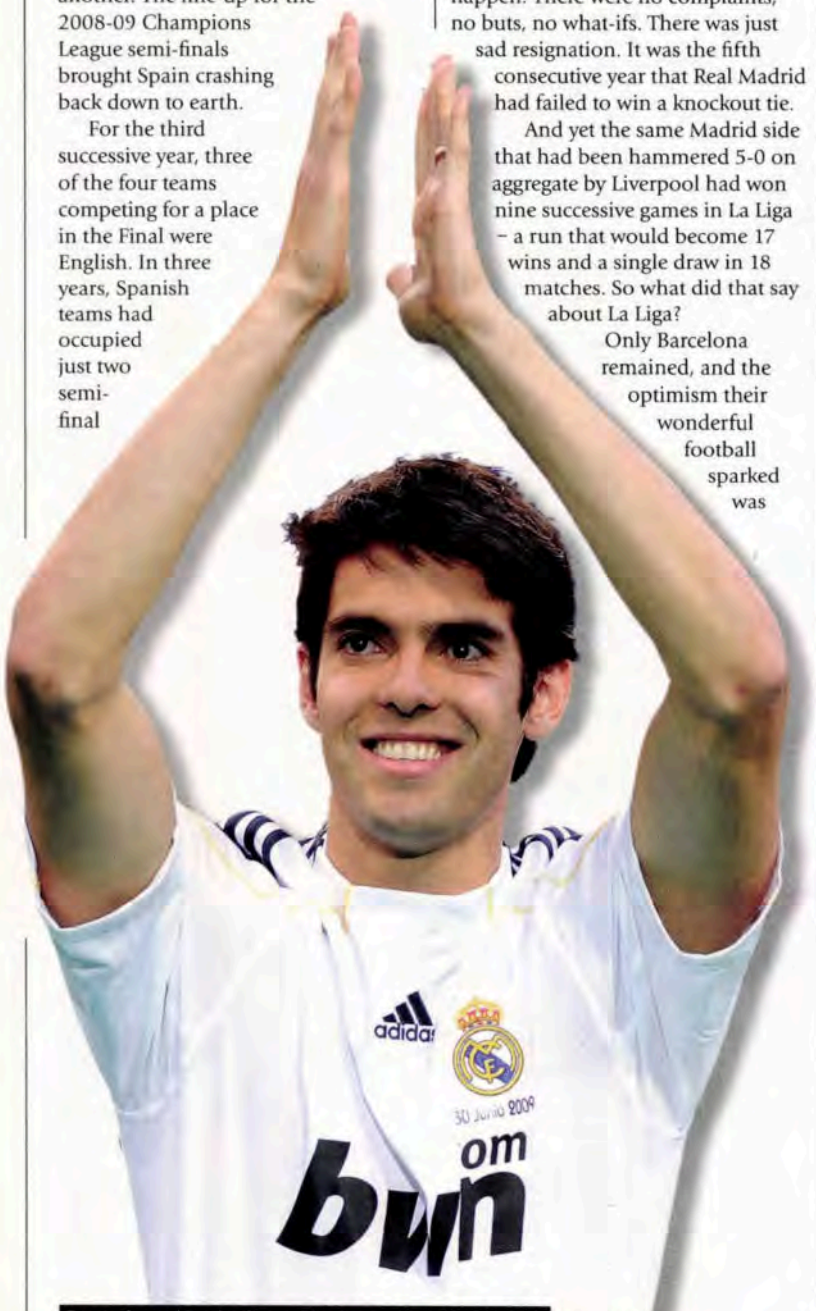
Comprehensive victory

Barcelona's cool and comprehensive victory over United was the first step. Now, under new president Florentino Perez, Real Madrid have taken up the challenge. The 2009 World Player will be Barcelona's Leo Messi, the 2008 World Player has left England for Real Madrid, and the 2007 World Player has departed Italy for the same destination. Suddenly, Spanish football appears to be in rude health.

The media in the Spanish capital is fond of claiming that Real Madrid have done a huge service for Spanish football, as if Perez is some kind of benevolent benefactor looking out for everyone else's clubs, not just his own. Over in the Catalan capital, they claim Real Madrid are on course to sink Spanish football by sending transfer fees spiralling out of control.

They are, of course, both right. And both wrong.

Spanish football faces crippling debt, and could yet be confronted with a major crisis, but this season the world's best three players will play in La Liga. Treble-winning Barcelona, the finest side on the planet, are now up against the most exciting players on



Best in the world...why else would Kaka swap Serie A for La Liga?

the planet. Only in Spain can you see Messi, Kaka and Ronaldo. This summer, Spanish clubs have spent more than English or Italian ones.

For the first time there have (as yet) been no high-profile departures from La Liga, some of the Spanish diaspora looks set to return, and even the smaller clubs – aided by a generous tax regime – have a huge advantage over clubs in other countries.

While it is true that no English club wanted Jermaine Pennant, it is also true that Benitez and Wenger once did; just as it's true that for a club like Zaragoza to be able to offer him wages equivalent to £80,000-a-week in England is an extraordinary turnaround.

Meanwhile, despite his own desire to leave, Valencia have – somehow – resisted bids close to £40million for arguably the best striker in European football, David Villa. And Atletico have held onto Sergio Aguero.

Trouble is, at some levels at least, the illusion is just that: an illusion.

As usual, it is all about Barcelona and, especially, Real Madrid – and the gap between those two and the other clubs is bigger than ever. Virtually 80 per cent of all the transfer spending can be attributed to Real Madrid. At the time of writing, only five clubs have spent more than £7.5m and Barcelona have had to give up on David Villa and Franck Ribery – though it does look like Zlatan Ibrahimovic is about to arrive.

Yet, much as many clubs struggle to get players and make ends meet, there is no escaping the excitement, the expectation, the sheer glee at the prospect of the new season in Spain. If only because Barcelona have real challengers at last; if only because the world's greatest football rivalry looks set to be bigger and more bitter than ever before. And more glamorous.

Beneath the skin, La Liga may be struggling – the economic situation remains deeply concerning and organisationally it is still shambolic – but just look at those legs, the fluttering eyelashes, the brilliant smile.

La Liga has become the most attractive league in Europe. And try as you might, you just can't take your eyes off of it. ●

5 TO WATCH

Make or break...Pennant

On top...Perotti gets the better of Real Madrid's Sergio Ramos

JERMAINE PENNANT
(Zaragoza)
A shock signing for Zaragoza. Could this be the fresh start that Pennant needs, away from the pressure and spotlight of a really big club? Has the talent – if not always the temperament – to make a real impact.

CRISTIANO RONALDO
(Real Madrid)
It is stating the obvious, but it is going to be impossible not to be drawn to Ronaldo and Real Madrid this season.

Hero's welcome...Ronaldo

And the things that irritated English commentators about him – the posing, diving and the flicks – will not be frowned upon at the Bernabeu.

KARIM BENZEMA
(Real Madrid)
While all eyes were on Ronaldo, it was Benzema that really shone as Real Madrid made their bow against Irish side Shamrock Rovers in pre-season. Hit the post and also scored the winner with a cool finish.

Impressive start...Benzema

DAVID VILLA
(Valencia)
Arguably the continent's best striker, this is the player who has it all. Except, of course, the high-profile move that he wanted. The big question now is how will his frustration at being denied the chance to play for Real Madrid or Barcelona this season affect his performance as he builds towards the World Cup with Spain this summer?

DIEGO PEROTTI
(Sevilla)
The reason that Diego Capel got so few games for Sevilla last season. Only just 21, the Argentinian winger could be a real revelation this season. Quick, skilful and with an eye for goal.

Staying put...Villa

TEAM BY TEAM

Almeria
Coach: Hugo Sanchez
Key arrivals: Bernardello (Newell's Old Boys), Vargas (Boca Juniors)
Key departures: Bruno (Valencia), Mane (Getafe), Negredo (Real Madrid)
Prediction: Improved markedly after Sanchez's arrival last season but the departure of striker Alvaro Negredo is a major blow.

Athletic Bilbao
Coach: Joaquin Caparros
Key arrivals: Castillo (Sociedad)
Key departures: Lafuente (Numancia)
Prediction: Athletic resisted bids for striker Fernando Llorente and now look well placed for a top-half finish.

Atletico Madrid
Coach: Abel Resino
Key arrivals: Asenjo (Valladolid), Cabrera (Defensor), Juanito (Betis)
Key departures: Coupet (PSG), Franco (Galatasaray)
Prediction: So far, Diego Forlan and Sergio Aguero remain, as does coach Resino. But for how long? A fantastic forward line is too often let down by a dreadful defence but Atletico should challenge for a Champions League place.

Barcelona
Coach: Pep Guardiola
Key arrivals: Maxwell (Inter)
Key departures: Sylvinho (retired)
Prediction: Repeating last year's exploits will be impossible. There are question marks over their work in the transfer market: David Villa didn't come and nor did Franck Ribery. Looks like Zlatan Ibrahimovic will though, with Samuel Eto'o making way.

Deportivo
Coach: Miguel Angel Lotina
Key arrivals: Angulo (Leixoes), Juca (Partizan)
Key departures: Barragan (Valladolid), Munua (Malaga), Verdu (Espanyol)
Prediction: Financial problems have seen Deportivo lose a number of players and bring in modest additions, but they still have a good enough squad to finish in the top half.

Espanyol
Coach: Mauricio Pochettino
Key arrivals: Camacho (Caracas), Nakamura (Celtic), Pillud (Newell's Old Boys), Sahar (Chelsea), Verdu (Deportivo)
Key departures: Torrejon (Racing)
Prediction: At long last, Espanyol have a stadium of their own after years as a tenant at the city's Olympic stadium. Under Pochettino they finished last season extremely strongly. Optimism abounds, but reality suggests that things won't be so easy.

Getafe
Coach: Michel
Key arrivals: Codina (Real Madrid), Mane (Almeria)
Key departures: Granero (Real Madrid), Uche (Zaragoza)
Prediction: Michel took over at the very back end of last season, securing survival on the final day. But his long-term record is less encouraging.

Malaga
Coach: Juan Ramon Muniz
Key arrivals: Munua (Deportivo), Valdo (Espanyol)
Key departures: Calleja (Osasuna), Eliseu (Lazio)
Prediction: Last year's revelation, this year's relegation fodder? So far 13 players have followed coach Antonio Tapia out the door. If they cannot persuade Sevilla to let them have Duda for another season, it will be a big blow.

Mallorca
Coach: Gregorio Manzano
Key arrivals: Tejera (Chelsea)
Key departures: Moya (Valencia), Navarro (Valencia)
Prediction: Mallorca's future remains uncertain as they look for a new owner. They have already lost a raft of players and striker Aritz Aduriz is up for sale. More struggles await.

Osasuna
Coach: Jose Antonio Camacho
Key arrivals: Aranda (Numancia)
Key departures: Calleja (Malaga), Cruchaga (retired), Ezquerro (released), Plasil (Bordeaux)
Prediction: Survival on the final day suggests that Osasuna will suffer yet again but Camacho is in tune with the club's identity. Should survive.

Racing Santander
Coach: Juan Carlos Mandia
Key arrivals: Crespo (Sevilla), Morris (Panathinaikos), Torrejon (Espanyol), Pereira (Villarreal), Zigic (Valencia)
Key departures: Garay (Real Madrid), Luccin (Zaragoza), Marcano (Villarreal),
Prediction: Under new management and lacking money, Racing have lost key players. They are trying to get Nikola Zigic back on loan but may struggle.

Real Madrid
Coach: Manuel Pellegrini
Key arrivals: Albiol (Valencia), Benzema (Lyon), Kaka (Milan), Ronaldo (Man Utd)
Key departures: Cannavaro (Juventus), Codina (Getafe), Garcia (Benfica), Saviola (Benfica)
Prediction: Anything less than the best will be a disappointment. There can be no doubt that Cristiano Ronaldo, Karim Benzema and Kaka will improve Madrid, or that Pellegrini is an extremely able coach, but there are other key positions that need filling – such as central midfielder and some defensive cover. Must be considered favourites though.

Sevilla
Coach: Manolo Jimenez
Key arrivals: Alfaro (Tenerife), Zokora (Tottenham)
Key departures: Crespo (Racing), Maresca (Olympiakos), Navarro (retired)
Prediction: The surprise is that Jimenez is still at the club; a third-place finish meant that Sevilla renewed his contract despite his many detractors. Not the side they were when they almost won the league two seasons ago, but remain a competitive club that enjoy rare stability.

Sporting Gijon
Coach: Manolo Preciado
Key arrivals: Arnolin (Guimaraes), Botia (Barca B), Juan Pablo (Numancia), Rivera (Betis)
Key departures: Omar (Malaga)
Prediction: Survived on the final day last season and, though they are aiming higher, would settle for the same again.

Tenerife
Coach: Jose Luis Oltra
Key arrivals: Bellvis (Valencia), Nunez (Atletico B)
Key departures: Alfaro (Sevilla)
Prediction: The last of the promoted teams, Tenerife know that survival is all that they can expect as they return to the top flight for the first time in seven years. Much will depend on top scorer Nino.

Valencia
Coach: Unai Emery
Key arrivals: Bruno (Mallorca), Mathieu (Toulouse), Moya (Mallorca)
Key departures: Albiol (Real Madrid), Bellvis (Tenerife), Edu (Corinthians), Miguel (released), Morientes (released), Viana (released)
Prediction: Amazingly, David Villa, David Silva and the rest are still around. Only Raul Albiol has departed as Valencia lurch from crisis to salvation and back again. Supposed new investors suggest a brighter future but Valencia's fans have been let down before. Valencia have the raw materials to be genuine contenders, but...well, there's always a "but".

Valladolid
Coach: Jose Luis Mendilibar
Key arrivals: Manucho (Man Utd), Pele (Porto)
Key departures: Asenjo (Atletico)
Prediction: Twelve players have been bought in, with 13 shipped out, in a bid to avoid a third successive final-day fight against relegation. There is optimism but only of the very cautious kind.

Villarreal
Coach: Ernesto Villaverde
Key arrivals: Marcano (Racing), Montero (Independiente, Ecu)
Key departures: Cygan (released), Fernandez (Sporting Lisbon), Nihat (Besiktas)
Prediction: The departure of Manuel Pellegrini does not seem to have concerned Villarreal fans too much; his replacement is the well-respected former Espanyol boss Villaverde and Villarreal have retained the vast majority of their key players. Should compete again.

Xerez
Coach: Jose Angel Ziganda
Key arrivals: none
Key departures: Altidore (Villarreal)
Prediction: Their president was arrested and resigned after a 4am shoot-up at a brothel. They started pre-season with just 13 players – and very nearly without a coach until Ziganda took over at the eleventh hour. Relegation surely beckons.

Zaragoza
Coach: Marcelino
Key arrivals: Carrizo (Lazio), Luccin (Racing), Pennant (Liverpool), Uche (Getafe)
Key departures: none
Prediction: Should never have gone down two seasons ago, but came straight back up under Marcelino, one of the brightest managerial talents in the country. Have added to a strong squad and should finish in the top half.

Still there...Atletico's Forlan (second left)

Welcome...Zokora

New home...Nakamura

Resistance...Llorente

Huge expectations...Pellegrini

Great escape...Osasuna

Hard act to follow...Valverde

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THE MEN WHO MATTER

Shunsuke NAKAMURA

Will the complete Japanese midfielder now stand up?

JAPAN

Rising son...Nakamura celebrates a goal against Oman in a World cup qualifier

WHAT A YEAR this could be for Japan's most admired and experienced player. Having done it all in Asia and Scotland, Shunsuke Nakamura's summer move to Espanyol gives him one last chance to prove his star quality in a top European league – and then it's on to the World Cup.

Nakamura's slow emergence as his country's foremost player is testament as much to years of hard graft as to his breathtaking natural talent. At long last out of the shadow of Hidetoshi Nakata, he will be 32 next year and knows this will be his final chance for World Cup glory after not even being picked for Japan/Korea 2002 and making scant impact in Germany four years later.

Nakamura has always aroused feelings that run the gamut from adulation to rejection. He is hard-working, focused and incredibly skilful, but for many years he seemed too frail for the top level. He looked one-footed, slow and also quiet when leadership was needed. But extraordinary passes and pinpoint, heavily spun free-kicks and corners are the hallmark of Nakamura's game – and at those he is simply brilliant.

Three championships in four seasons at Celtic transformed the man. He is now more robust and stronger in one-on-one play. He will never be a leader like Nakata, but his mere presence adds solidity to the national team.

Nakamura impressed at club level from the word go. He burst into Xabier Azkargorta's Yokohama Marinos straight from high school, scoring five goals in 27 league appearances in his first season alongside such veterans as Julio Salinas. He was the J.League Player of the Year in 2000, but never won the league in Japan, and his time at Reggina in Italy, from 2002 to 2004, produced only mixed results. Celtic seemed an odd choice for a player of his supposed physical limitations, but his game grew extraordinarily under Gordon Strachan – and now is the time to show that on a bigger stage.

> "Celtic seemed an odd choice for a player of his supposed physical limitations but three league titles in four seasons transformed the man"

If he does not, Nakamura the national-team player is in danger of being remembered only as an Asian Cup star. Takeshi Okada had him on the bench twice before the 1998 World Cup but never gave him a game. He played a big part in Philippe Troussier's Asian Cup triumph of 2000, but Troussier lost faith after a 5-0 loss to France at the start of 2001, clearly deciding Nakamura did not have what it took. He started only two more matches under Troussier during the build-up for 2002 and even two goals against Honduras could not change the coach's mind.

Zico's man

But Nakamura's brilliance made him Zico's man. Whereas Troussier always spoke of wanting no stars, Zico loved Nakamura's genius. He was back in the side for the Brazilian's first match in charge, in October 2002, and has remained a key squad member ever since. His greatest achievement was the 2004 Asian Cup victory, when he was named player of the tournament. But though he also played all three matches in Germany, and scored against Australia, 2006 turned into a year that he would probably prefer to forget.

Okada is now using Nakamura on the right of the attacking midfield three in a 4-2-3-1 formation. He has competition – Keisuke Honda and Kengo Nakamura have also looked good in that role – but he can play other positions too, and his form will be vital for not only Japan's chances in South Africa next year but also his own place in football history.

Mike Plastow

Set-piece expert...Nakamura troubles Australia's defence

David PIZARRO

Is it too late for Chile's talented midfielder to play in South Africa?

> "It hurt me a lot to see we were losing and there were team-mates who didn't care. We could lose and that night they would be happy in the discos"

THERE APPEARS to be a campaign in some quarters in Chile to get David Pizarro to change his mind about playing for the national side – and any such movement is sure to have the backing of Marcelo Bielsa, the man responsible for making the country virtual certainties to go the World Cup finals for the first time in 12 years.

"David is the best Chilean player at the moment and of course I'd like to be able to count on him, but if he's made a decision he must have a good reason and there are times when you have to know how to respect that," said Bielsa when he took charge in 2007.

Pizarro, now 29, won 36 caps between 1999 and 2006 before walking away from the national side, unhappy with the set-up, performances and results.

He has been quoted as saying: "I love playing for the national team, for me that was always the most important thing. So it hurt me a lot to see we were losing and there were team-mates who didn't care. We could lose and that night they would be happy in the discos."

It didn't help matters that the then-national coach, Juvenal Olmos, was not convinced that the deep-lying midfield position Pizarro occupied for Luciano Spalletti at Udinese and then Roma suited his Chile team.

Surplus to requirements

Bielsa's side are currently second in the South American qualifying group, a point behind Brazil with four games to go, so it might seem that Pizarro is surplus to requirements. But there is plenty of time for players to lose form and others to play their way into the side.

The warm-up period will be critical, and Bielsa knows this from the bitter experience of 2002 in Japan where his brilliant Argentina team of the qualifiers flopped in the first round.

Pizarro could be a fresh addition to a squad that will be wary of peaking too soon or becoming overconfident, but the onus is on the player to make the first move if he wants to rejoin the international set-up – a situation that he knows only too well could lead his critics to accuse him of simply jumping on a good horse while it is winning.

Rex Gowar

Wasted talent...coach Bielsa is hoping Pizarro can be persuaded to return to the national fold

SIX OF THE BEST UNDER-21

Marcus BERG

SWEDEN

WITH seven goals in four games, he deserved a pair of Golden Boots, let alone the one he received for finishing as the tournament's top scorer. A hat-trick in Sweden's opener against Belarus was the perfect start, and from that moment on he was on an irresistible path, with his pace, directness and poise bringing doubles in both the win over Serbia and the semi-final loss to England. On the face of it he has everything a striker needs: two good feet, an instinct for making space for himself, an insatiable hunger for goals and an intimate feel for the game. Certainly the partnership he formed up front with PSV Eindhoven's Ola Toivonen was a thing of beauty, and his second goal in the Belarus game showed just how well they worked together as he volleyed home Toivonen's perfectly weighted chip. The only blemish on his fortnight was a missed penalty in the shoot-out with England. Hailing from the same town of Torsby as ex-England coach Sven Goran Eriksson, he has been a regular scorer for the past three seasons with IFK Gothenberg and Dutch outfit Groningen. He joined Hamburg this summer for a reported £8million.

RAUL GARCIA

SPAIN

RUGGEDLY effective and disciplined in the goalless draw with Germany, and man of the match in the ultimately academic 2-0 victory over Finland, Spain's captain and central midfield regulator did enough to impress the Scandinavian gallery. Yet he might well have produced even more – and helped his team avoid first-round elimination – if coach Lopez Caro had not shackled him in the early part of the tournament. In the Germany game, and the 2-0 defeat to England, he seemed under orders not to move forward at any cost – and it did neither him or his side any good. Against Finland, though, the handbrake was released and he started to play a much more rounded and natural game, one based not only on ball-winning but making the most of his 20/20 vision, thoughtful distribution, shooting power and threat in the air at set pieces. A native of Pamplona, he made the breakthrough at Osasuna in 2004 and it was not long before Real Madrid, Valencia and Atletico Madrid were all vying for his services, the latter eventually splashing out £10m to bring him on board two years ago.

Adam JOHNSON

ENGLAND

WITH relegated Middlesbrough allowing England winger Stewart Downing to join Aston Villa for £12m this summer, the Championship side have a ready-made replacement in the Sunderland-born left winger who sparkled throughout the Sweden campaign. However, he too has his top-flight suitors and, after making a positive impact on the international stage, a spell in the English second tier may not be the wisest career move. A tricky, elusive player whose sole sporting mission is to take on and beat the opposing full-back, the Premier League has not produced a flank wizard with such ball skills and sheer bravado since Steve McManaman's days at Liverpool. Always expressive and never frightened to try the unusual, he is a breath of fresh air in a game increasingly stereotypical in approach. At the Boro academy, one of the best in the UK, he has clearly received an excellent footballing education and, crucially, added plenty of ballast to the stick-thin physique of his teenage years.

STARS

Nick Bidwell picks the outstanding performers from this summer's European Championship finals

Gojko KACAR

SERBIA

WHILE the Hertha Berlin youngster insists he is happiest as a defensive midfielder, Serbia Under-21 boss Slobodan Krcmarevic prefers to use him as a centre-back or an emergency striker, someone to throw forward when a game has to be chased. One of the rare satisfactions in a side that failed to reach the last four, he is the type of player coaches love to have at their disposal. Dynamic, combative and spirited, a tower of power aerially and an accomplished marksman who managed five goals in a qualifier against Hungary last year. His header from a corner in the 3-1 defeat against Sweden was Serbia's only goal of the tournament, and late in the 0-0 draw with Italy he hit the post with a scissors kick which, had it gone in, would have taken his side through. A bit-part player when Serbia were runners-up at the 2007 tournament, he arrived at Hertha from Vojvodina midway through the 2007-08 season at a cost of £2.5m, though he must be worth at least four times that figure now. From a famous Serbian boxing family, his uncles Tadija and Slobodan won silver and gold respectively at the 1976 and 1980 Olympics.

Marco MOTTA

ITALY

THE right-back is a class act from tip to toe who has put himself in with a real chance of displacing the fading Gianluca Zambrotta in the full *Azzurri* line-up. Robust, strong in the air, rapid in movement and thought, and vibrant and precise going forward, he also did a fine job as skipper. The Italians like to think of this competition as their own personal preserve and he was in his element transmitting his experience and will-to-win to the rest of the team. Having already figured in the senior squad for the spring fixtures against Montenegro and Republic of Ireland – though he did not play – he could well be one of the youngsters Marcello Lippi may turn to in a bid to freshen up his ageing side. However, last season was a mixed one for the Atalanta academy graduate. On the outside looking in at Udinese – mainly because of a knee injury – a mid-season loan move to Roma followed. Ostensibly Cristian Panucci, Cicinho and Marco Cassetti all had stronger claims for the right-back slot, but he quickly made the position his own and had coach Luciano Spalletti purring over his nerveless performances. Not surprisingly, Roma have made the switch permanent.

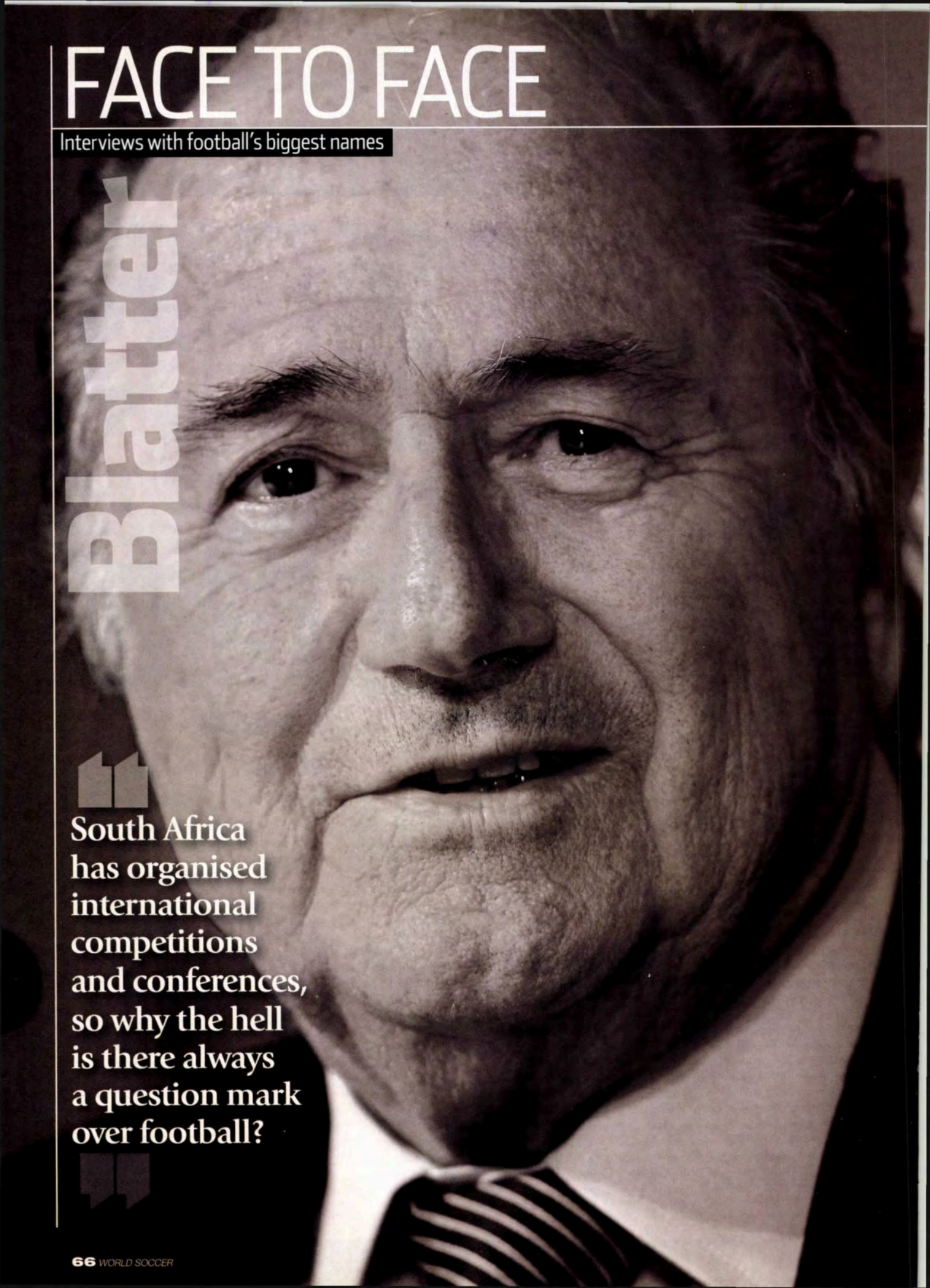
Mesut OZIL

GERMANY

HAVING made two goals and scored another in the 4-0 Final victory over England, Werder Bremen's playmaker of Turkish extraction certainly deserved the standing ovation he received from the Malmo crowd when taken off near the end of the game. An obvious choice as man of the match, he was essentially the difference between the sides, supplying bountiful amounts of imagination, dribbling virtuosity and killer passes. Horst Hrubesch, Germany's Under-21 coach, even called him "one of the most perfect players I've ever worked with". Ironically, the Final was the first time in the tournament that he had lined up in his preferred attacking midfield station, Hrubesch employing him wide on the left but giving him the freedom to move inside. Until then he had been used as a second striker and, while he looked the part in the opening game against Spain, he did not convince for the most part. At home-town club Schalke he had a reputation of being a talented brat who played only for his himself but the same accusation could not be levelled at him today. He is maturing rapidly and the challenge of filling the boots of departed Bremen star Diego is one he should revel in.

FACE TO FACE

Interviews with football's biggest names



Blatter

"South Africa has organised international competitions and conferences, so why the hell is there always a question mark over football?"

SEPP BLATTER

Keeping the **faith**

The FIFA president insists South Africa is ready to host the World Cup next year

Is it true that FIFA had to give away tickets in order to bring more people into the Confederations Cup games to improve the atmosphere and the pictures for television?
We were not giving all the tickets away but what I did ask of the organising committee was that they made sure there was more of a crowd in the stadia. It is not a principle of FIFA to give away tickets but it is a principle of FIFA to offer tickets to those people who cannot afford them. This has everything to do with solidarity and flexibility. But next year we will not have this problem at the World Cup finals. There will be 450,000 or 500,000 visitors from all the different countries whose national teams have qualified to play in South Africa. Ticket sales for next year are already on a good scale.

Some of the visiting coaches complained about the noise being made by local fans with their vuvuzelas [traditional trumpets, pictured below]. Have you made a firm decision yet about whether to allow them into the stadia for the World Cup?
There are many different sounds in the south of Africa; for instance the way the people sing and dance and drum, as well as use these trumpets. I know there are some people who are not happy with that but I have just read that Mr [Marcello] Lippi, the coach of Italy, said that though this noise was something new it contributed to the atmosphere and his players just had to learn to adapt. I know some television companies have complained about the way this special sound overlaps the voices of their commentators but this is a technical matter. It is not up to FIFA to stop people making a noise in a football stadium. It's a matter of the local culture and everywhere is different. Players who play in Switzerland will hear cowbells.

But wasn't there a concern that these trumpets could, in the wrong circumstances, be used as weapons to attack other fans?
This is still a question being discussed – and not only among the media. But we cannot say tomorrow that these should not be used. That would be an interference in personal rights.

How important is it to have a good showing by the host team?
South Africa have a good technical quality. They also have one year in which they can prepare this team so it matures and grows stronger, then I believe it will be a very good team at the World Cup finals next year. It is certainly important for the organisation that the home team goes through from the first round because this will help to maintain interest in the competition; it's a matter of enthusiasm for the event in the host country of a World Cup or a Confederations Cup. In the last three World Cups the hosts all went a long way. In 1998 France reached the Final – and won it, of course – in 2002 South Korea reached the last four of the tournament, as did Germany in 2006.

Have you finally resolved the issue over whether a television replay was used to assist the referee [Howard Webb] in his decision in the last minute of the game between Egypt and Brazil when he awarded Brazil the penalty with which they won the match and also showed an Egyptian a red card?
I can reassure everyone that the decision of the referee was not taken with the assistance of any video evidence. That is the first thing. Secondly, to make sure there is no more doubt about the issue, as from now television sets are not permitted for anyone on the touchline, either the team coaches or the fourth official or the FIFA match reporter. So now nobody can suggest that there is any interference in the referee's decision by the use of video. This is a sensible outcome from a situation which caused some problems, but it was clear from the report of the referee and the match commissioner that there was no extra input of that sort.

What is your opinion about technological assistance for referees?
I am still firmly of the opinion that we should not use video for decisions on the field of play – and this opinion has been confirmed and reconfirmed by the International Football Association Board which is the guardian of the laws of our game. That is why we are carrying out, in the Europa League [formerly the UEFA Cup], an experiment with two additional assistant referees outside the pitch, behind the goals, to monitor what happens around the goal line and in the penalty box. I believe this is the future and we will see, after one year, how it works. But one thing's for sure: no more television monitors anywhere near the fourth official!

What did you feel about South Africa's organisation of the Confederations Cup?
I don't know how it looked from a media point of view because I have no direct contact, but I do have the feedback from the participating teams and they were full of compliments at the manner in which they were received and treated in South Africa. I have to say, from what I saw visiting the stadia and the host cities, the general atmosphere was very good. Now the Confederations Cup is over we will see where any amendments and improvements have to be made for next year. I have been told there was a problem with park-and-ride schemes because the security checks meant people were not getting into the stadia in time for kick-off. Clearly, the way that works will have to be reviewed.

Are you still as confident as ever about South Africa's ability to host a successful World Cup?
A section of the media from the beginning was not at ease in trusting South Africa or Africa to organise the World Cup. But every year 10 million tourists come to South Africa. It's a country that has organised international competitions and conferences so why the hell is there always a question mark over football? In these economic times people need hope and entertainment and that is what football provides, so let's live it up with the people of South Africa and trust them.

Interview by Keir Radnedge

BORA MILUTINOVIC

I teach them **a little bit** about life

The much-travelled Serb on coaching Iraq at the Confederations Cup

● You lost to Spain right at the death in the Confederations Cup after keeping them at bay all game. How did you contain them?
It's not up to me to say how you should play against Spain, there are several ways to play against any opponent. We played like we did because it was the best formation for the players I had in my squad. But we didn't play anti-football. It was fair. There were no fouls, no injuries, no time-wasting.

But you were quite physical...
The Iraqi people are very aggressive when they play. I stopped training three or four times because they tackled so hard. I told them: "If you do this in the game, you are no longer on the field." But I'm proud of what we did. Of course, normally you want to win and go through, but I am so happy for them. I am more than proud. I am happy for them, for the country, for myself, about what we did.

How did you end up in charge of Iraq in the first place?
It's simple. They were looking for a coach and they came to me. We prepared the team in Doha, at the ASPIRE Academy, which is a beautiful place, and this helped us.

How much did you know about the Iraq team before you took charge?
Well, six players play in Qatar and I know them, I have watched them on television. But it's very difficult because you don't have the statistics, you don't have anything. I made some good decisions, but it's not easy.

What was your experience of working in Iraq? Was it a tough place to work?
What it is like to live in these conditions people just cannot know. I stayed there seven days, but my players live in these conditions all the time. But I am proud of the job we did together. I respect so much the Iraqi culture, the people. I feel so unhappy to see the people living in these conditions. It's very difficult for somebody who doesn't know what it's like to understand. If you want to understand what life is like in Iraq, go there for three days – no more – and afterwards give me your view on the people. This is much more important than football. The players leave this difficult country and they have this huge difference in attitude. In the Confederations Cup I saw them all smile and enjoy life and that makes me proud.

"It is very difficult for someone who doesn't know to understand what life is like in Iraq. I have so much respect for the people"

So was your job as much about preparing the players as preparing the football?
Listen, I am the coach. They asked me what I could tell them about life. I shared with them my experience, everything. Joy, life, what you need to do, the way you need to do it. I taught them a little bit about life and this is much more important than football.

You are the only man to have coached five different countries at the World Cup finals [Mexico 1986, Costa Rica 1990, USA 1994, Nigeria 1998 and China 2002]. What are the chances of you making it six in South Africa next year?
I hope so. I am looking and I am available. It was just a short contract with Iraq and now it is over. If somebody wants Bora for the World Cup next year then we can talk!

What is your advice for coaches who might be going to a World Cup finals for the first time next year – Fabio

FERNANDO TORRES

Premier League **is priority**

● Which is more important for you to win with Liverpool: the Premier League or the Champions League?
When I came to England my priority was to win the Champions League, but I soon learned from the fans that I had it the wrong way around. They told me: "We must win the Premier League," because the club had not won the championship for nearly 20 years. Now I feel the same way. It's even more important now because Manchester United have won the same number of titles as us [18]. We have to overtake them this season. Winning the league here would be like winning the European Championship with Spain last year.

Will Cristiano Ronaldo's departure to Real Madrid make it easier for you to overtake Manchester United?
He has been one of the best players in the world for the last three years and it will be a big loss for the Premier League. It will be strange, at first, watching him on television playing for Real and not in the Premier League. But I don't think Manchester United will become weaker, they have so many brilliant players. Next season is not about them losing more games but about Liverpool winning more games. It's all in the mind.

You have said frequently that you feel at home in Liverpool. Why is that?
It's because Liverpool is a working city. At the weekend the people go to watch their team at Anfield and they want to "escape" by watching the best team in the country. I had a lot of offers from a lot of clubs but I was always attracted to Liverpool because of the reputation of the people from the city, the club's supporters and their history, and I wanted to help to make this one of the

Capello, for instance?
It's not important that he has never been to the finals. The World Cup, Milan, Real Madrid, it is no different. Only the name is different. The difference is you don't need to motivate your players and this is a huge advantage. It's important not to have injury problems perhaps, but that's normal. It's about the best preparations, how you control the emotions, how you control the public.

Can Capello succeed where so many England managers have failed?
This is a great opportunity for England, they have the momentum. It is like a wave in the ocean. This generation – Rooney, Gerrard – so many great players. Fabio is very smart, very experienced, everything. I don't think England will win the World Cup but this is their chance.

Interview by Chris Hatherall

GILBERTO SILVA

We're Brazil, **everyone** expects

● The way you celebrated after winning this year's Confederations Cup was as if you had won the World Cup. Did it feel that good?
What we did was something fantastic. We celebrated the title a lot because it was not easy to achieve. But the personality we have in the team, to come back in the game [Brazil were 2-0 down to USA], and the quality we have was something special. This year was not so easy for me because I had to fight to get back into the Brazil side, so to be there in the Final was extra important as well. Now we want to go back next year and do the same again in the World Cup.

How important was the experience of the Confederations Cup for Brazil as a team?
Very important. Every competition for Brazil is very difficult because if we don't do our job in the proper way we can't achieve what we want. And because we are Brazil everyone expects so much. We also found out about what it will be like in South Africa next year. We saw the pitches, we felt the atmosphere, we got to understand the country.

Are you prepared for some defensive opponents in the World Cup?
You have to expect it. Sometimes teams will mark man to man, as South Africa did against us in the Confederations Cup, and in these kind of games you need to be patient, which we were. If we think we can win every game very easily it's not right, football has changed. You need to be aware of that. If we are not focused for 95 minutes it's hard.

Has it has worked out well for you at Panathinaikos?
Yes. It was not easy to leave Arsenal, but I needed to be in the team to play for Brazil. And at Panathinaikos I am playing every week and I am playing for Brazil, so in the end it was a good decision. There was no bad feeling at Arsenal. The only reason I left England was because I didn't have many chances to play. Maybe if I did I would have stayed another season.

Can you ever see yourself playing in England again?
It's not impossible but I am 32 now so I doubt it.

Interview by Chris Hatherall

greatest clubs in the world again.

Do you think Manchester City can be equally as big with all their spending power and plans?
Manchester City must first play in the Champions League, or at least the Europa League, if they want to persuade the really big players to join them. Big players want to win trophies and Manchester City are not in the race for trophies in England, let alone Europe. Chelsea were among the top clubs in the Premier League before they started to sign really big stars. Now everyone wants to play for Chelsea. When City tried to sign Kaka they offered him a fantastic contract, but there are more things in football than money.

Such as?
A player wants to be remembered for what he has won, for what he has given his club. Ten years after you stop playing you want to have medals, trophies. You may have a fantastic car and home but it's not the same. No player looks back and counts the money.

Which is best: Premier League or La Liga?
English football has an enormous following across the world, not just because of the players but because of its history, its tradition, the excitement, the capacity crowds. The other leagues can learn a lot, even La Liga. Madrid have signed Kaka and Ronaldo, and Barcelona have Xavi and Messi but, really, the Premier League is way ahead.

Interview by Keir Radnedge

MEMORIES

The great teams, big personalities and major talking points

ALF RAMSEY

The General

Brian Glanville remembers England's 1966 World Cup-winning manager

IT WAS INDEED another football world, and one in which Alf Ramsey – who was destined to play right-back for his country in a World Cup and then, 16 years later, to win it triumphantly as their manager – found no professional club until he was 23.

Moreover, when he left school in Dagenham, Essex, then still to a large extent a rural community rather than the urban town it is today, he spent two full years, despite his manifest promise, not being able to play football at all. And when at long last Portsmouth scout Ned Liddell, a highly experienced figure in pre-war football, offered him a trial, for which he duly applied, he never heard another word.

How remote from these days, when you sometimes think that unless a boy has been taken on by a league club by the age of eight or nine he has no future.

It is an age, too, when we are led to believe that no boy can succeed without coaching – in the bizarre view of even the respected Trevor Brooking, from as early as five years old. And yet Ramsey was never coached. He simply played and loved playing from boyhood, mastering the skills of the game along country lanes, often with little rubber balls. All this has been supremely well qualified and researched by that talented, versatile author Leo McKinstry, whose biography of Ramsey could hardly be superseded.

I saw a great deal of Ramsey all over the world when he was England manager, though I can't say I knew him well. But then who did? Did I, ultimately, like him? Yes, emphatically. And those who accused him of having no sense of humour simply didn't know him at all.

Two instances may suffice. One, in Glasgow, in 1967, before what used to be known as the Intercontinental Cup, between Celtic and Racing Club of Buenos Aires at Hampden Park, I had tea with Alf in a city hotel. Then we went outside to call a taxi to take us to Hampden. Hopeless. We stood and stood until a battered blue car came along, full of young Scots fans. "Oh, it's Sir Alf! Get in, get in!" We did, and at once the raillery began. "That England team in the World Cup! So many poor players!"

"Well," said Alf, coolly, "for example, who?"

"That Roger Hunt!"

"Roger Hunt," said Alf, "scores 25 goals a season, every season. Yes, Roger Hunt's a poor player!"

Then there was the journey to a match out of London, sat in a railway compartment with several journalists and Alf. In that strange, strangled accent – I accept that, though I termed it "sarn't major posh", Ramsey never took elocution lessons – he reflected: "I don't know why you people keep telephoning me." He then went round each of us in turn, saying: "I never telephone you. I never telephone you!"

When he came to myself, he said: "You never telephone me!"

Real progress

Pompey's loss was emphatically Southampton's gain and Alf began playing for them while serving in the army, happy days in which he became a sergeant. He was a centre-half then, having not long since been a centre-forward. But real progress was made when he moved to right-back.

England capped him for the first time at Highbury in 1948, an easy run-out, 6-0 against Switzerland. Curiously, however, he would lose his Southampton place to Bill Ellerington, who would also play for England.

Vision of glory...Ramsey always believed England would win the World Cup

> "Those who accused him of having no sense of humour simpy didn't know him"

The summer of 1949 saw him make an important move to Tottenham; important because it brought him under the influence of Arthur Rowe, the ex-Spurs and England centre-half who had just taken over the team and was preparing to inculcate his exciting, original push-and-run tactics. "Make it simple, make it accurate, make it quick" was his formula.

Ramsey, to be honest, was never quick. At least not physically, though his football brain worked very fast indeed. His influence on the team was paramount. Not for nothing was he known as "the General".

He wasn't, oddly enough, the captain – that was the exuberant Welsh left-half Ronnie Burgess – but Ramsey's was the prevailing influence. When he wasn't there, and authoritative, Spurs suffered. That season, they romped away with the Second Division, and the season after that they won the

THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY

World beaters...but not all the class of '66 got what they deserved

ALF RAMSEY did not receive a winner's medal when England beat West Germany in the 1966 World Cup Final – nor did the 11 non-playing members of his squad. However this June, following a decision by FIFA to award medals to all non-playing squad members and coaching staff at past World Cups, England's non-playing 11 received their medals. They 11 are:

Back row, left to right: Ron Springett (1 in 1966 pic), Jimmy Armfield (2), Ron Flowers (3), Norman Hunter (4), Ian Callaghan (5), John Connelly (6), George Eastham (7), Jimmy Greaves (8).

Front row, left to right: Peter Bonetti (9), Gerry Byrne (10), Terry Paine (11). George Cohen received the medal on behalf of Ramsey's family, while David Cocker accepted a medal on behalf of his father, team physio Les Cocker (12), and Margaret Shepherdson received a medal on behalf of her husband, team trainer Harold Shepherdson (13).

Justice...the "forgotten" heroes finally received their medals at Wembley in June

championship itself. Meanwhile, Alf had been a member of the England World Cup team which lost so sensationally to a ragtag and bobtail USA side in Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

There were those who felt his alleged antipathy to Scottish football stemmed from his problems with such Scottish left-wingers as Billy Liddell, Bobby Mitchell and Barnsley's Johnny Kelly. Once, when England arrived at Glasgow airport to play Scotland at Hampden, Alf was assailed by a fulsome Scottish journalist: "Welcome to Scotland, Sir Alf!" To which the curt reply was: "You must be effin joking!"

In 1955, having retired after losing his place at Spurs, Ramsey was made the manager of Ipswich Town, which was an inspired appointment. Ipswich, newcomers to the league shortly before World War Two, seemed little but a country side, financed by the patrician Cobbold family, whose cheerful, generous, alcoholic scion, the ever hospitable John Cobbold, would become Ramsey's mentor and chairman. Ipswich began badly in their Third Division (South) season, and Ramsey needed the encouragement of the then-chairman, Alistair Cobbold, to find his feet. But this he triumphantly did and, on the very last day of the season, a 2-0 win at Alf's old club, Southampton, saw them promoted on goal average.

Despite the Cobbolds' wealth, they gave Ramsey little to spend, but he showed phenomenal skill in building a fine team from what you might call remnants.

He used the veteran left-winger Jimmy Leadbetter deep on the flank, to the confusion of opponents. Ray Crawford, then 22, came from Pompey – where he had crossed swords with the manager, Freddie Cox – for a mere £5,000. A former army jungle fighter in Malaya, he proved a prolific centre-forward, forging a devastating relationship with the lanky Ted Phillips, a local man and very much a countryman. From West Ham for peanuts came Andy Nelson, who would stiffen the defence as skipper and centre-half.

Yet who could have foretold that, under Ramsey, Ipswich would emulate the Tottenham team whose "General" he had been, winning Second and First Division titles in successive seasons, in 1961 and 1962. And their disciplinary record was, like Alf's own as a player, immaculate.

It was after their triumph in 1962 that he left to become manager of England. He was not first choice; that was Jimmy Adamson, captain of Burnley, coach to the 1962 England World Cup team in Chile and a Footballer of the Year even though he never won a cap for his country. But Adamson turned them down, feeling he did not have enough experience.

When he took over, Ramsey insisted the selection committee, which ludicrously picked the teams (though less so in recent years) be abolished, reducing them to a so-called senior international committee for whom, dangerously as it transpired, he never hid his contempt.

"You've beaten them once – now go out and do it again"

Ramsey exhorts his men to victory over West Germany

Proud partnership ...Ramsey and his wife Vicky

Religious significance

The truth was that, for Alf, football had an almost religious significance; you were either among the select – confined to players, coaches, managers – or you didn't count. The sportswriter Hugh McIlvanney once shrewdly pointed out that such a philosophy ran risks of alienating those excluded.

From the start, he insisted England would win the 1966 World Cup, which it was due to stage, but as time went by his increasingly cautious tactics came in for criticism and the team which did eventually win the World Cup was nicknamed the "wingless wonders". This, even though in the Final itself, Alan Ball, essentially an inside-forward, ran wild on the right wing in extra time and arguably won England the game, while, on the left, the right-footed Martin Peters – who was 10 years ahead of his time, according to Ramsey – curled in his threatening crosses.

Unflappable...Ramsey (centre) keeps calm as the England bench go through the emotions in the Final

Listen...Ramsey meets his Ipswich recruits

It's over...World Cup exit at Poland's hands in 1973

Unswervingly loyal to his men, Alf threatened to resign were Nobby Stiles dropped from the squad after a serious foul on France's Jacques Simon. Bobby Charlton, inside-forward and elusive left-winger by turns, now became the deep-lying centre-forward. Arguably, England began to play well only in the semi-final against Portugal. The quarter-final, against a bruising Argentina team which crudely misbehaved afterwards in the dressing room tunnel, moved Ramsey to utter words which would haunt him down the years in Latin America. In the semi-finals, he said, he hoped England would meet a team which wanted to play football "and not act as animals".

Portugal were duly beaten, and in the Final West Germany forced extra time with a controversial equaliser at the death. But Ramsey inspired his weary team – "You've beaten them once, now go out and do it again" – to prevail 4-2, though Geoff Hurst's second goal will forever be the subject of dispute over whether it crossed the line.

The 1970 World Cup in Mexico saw England severely handicapped in the quarter-final against West Germany by the mysterious illness of the supreme Gordon Banks. True, Peter Bonetti, his replacement, had a poor game but Ramsey hardly helped with his failure to substitute his exhausted backs, Keith Newton and Terry Cooper, a 2-0 lead mutating into a 3-2 defeat.

By 1972, when West Germany overwhelmed an ill-assembled England at Wembley in the European Championship quarter-final, Ramsey had plainly lost his way. Yet he lingered on until the spring of 1974 when, absurdly, he was dismissed after already picking his squad for a friendly in Portugal and for a subsequent tour. Behind this coup was the ineffable, ever-scheming FA director Sir Harold Thompson, a notable enemy. It was arguably high time that Ramsey went, but not like this. And not with the miserable pension allotted him.

Yet something had gone strangely wrong. Always famed for his idyllic relations with his players, he became manager of Birmingham City but fell out bitterly with the club's most gifted young player, Trevor Francis, and did not last long.

So he retired to Ipswich where, one feels, he had lost his *raison d'être* for football which had dominated his life to the exclusion of all other interests. What pathos there was in an exchange he had with the *Daily Mirror* journalist Nigel Clarke who was ghosting a series of his articles. When Clarke lamented that he'd never really had a father, Alf responded: "I'll be your father." He never had children of his own; only a stepdaughter of the wife he married.

And, alas, he would succumb to Alzheimer's. ●

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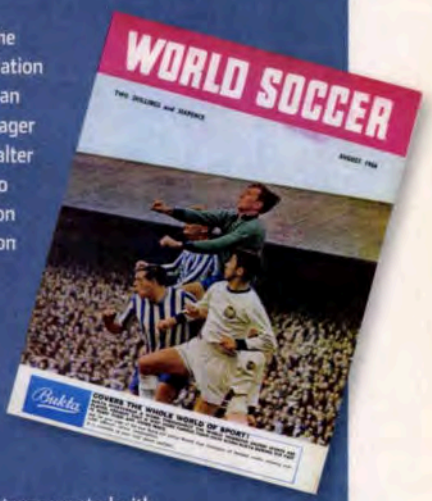
FROM THE ARCHIVES

AUGUST 1966
Ramsey may go further afield



Four years ago the Football Association decided to appoint an England team manager in succession to Walter Winterbottom, who had held the position since the resumption of international soccer on an organised scale after the war. Their final choice was the quiet, unobtrusive Alf Ramsey.

The appointment was greeted with unison all around the country. Everyone agreed that the appointment was a sound piece of judgement and that Ramsey, who had revitalised Ipswich Town from a sleepy Third Division side into a First Division side almost overnight by his own individualistic ideas on team spirit, would prepare a good World Cup party for the 1966 finals.

Ramsey's judgement day is about to arrive [Note: this was published before the 1966 World Cup Final]. Whether he has been successful or not, I think that he will resign his present appointment and move back into club management.

I go even further and suggest that the club he will join will be Wolves, who have obviously refrained from appointing a new manager since Stan Cullis was dismissed in September 1964.

The financial inducement would be better than he currently receives as the £5,000-a-year manager of the England side. This, of course, will play a vital part in any future decision that Ramsey might reach as part of the World Cup post-mortem.

LA confi

Home to the Galaxy and playground of the stars, Peterjon Cresswell visits 'The City of Angels'

California dreaming...the Home Depot Center's expansive entrance spells out its welcome to LA Galaxy fans

dential

DURING THE 1970s the North American Soccer League's boom years saw Pele and Franz Beckenbauer star for New York Cosmos on the east coast, while George Best and Johan Cruyff were the leading lights on the west coast with Los Angeles Aztecs.

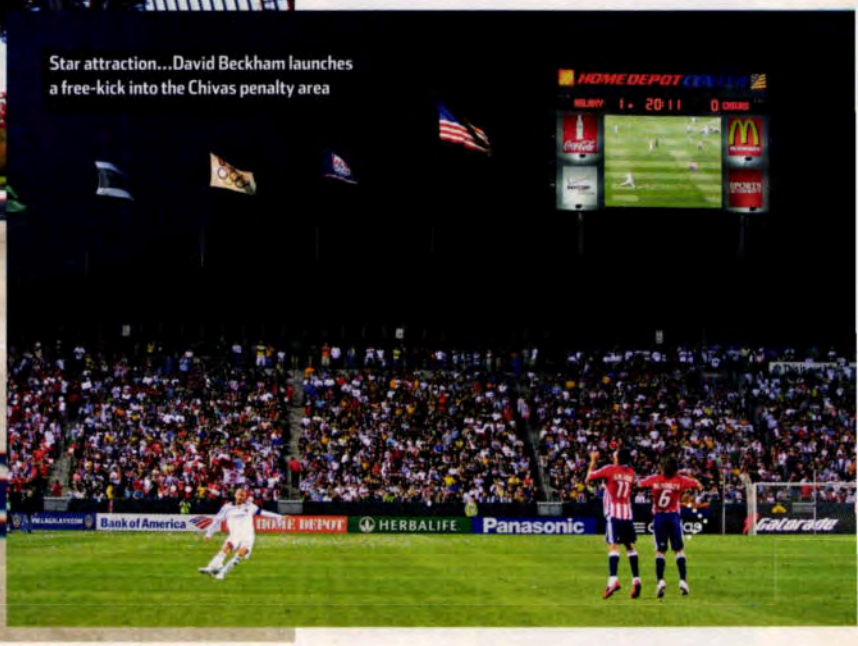
More than 30 years later it is David Beckham who is the latest LA attraction in the subsequent Major League Soccer (MLS). Yet despite all the fanfare of his arrival in 2007, Beckham is still to help Los Angeles Galaxy reach the end-of-season play-offs.

MLS launched in the aftermath of America's successful hosting of the 1994 World Cup, with the Rose Bowl in Los Angeles staging the Final in which Italy's Roberto Baggio famously skied his spot-kick in the penalty shoot-out to gift Brazil their fourth world crown.

A year later, billionaire Philip Anschutz founded Los Angeles Galaxy, taking the name from the star-studded surroundings.

After losing in two play-off Finals to DC United, LA Galaxy eventually won the MLS crown in 2002, beating New England Revolution 1-0 with a goal from Carlos Ruiz, who would notch 50 goals in 72 games for Galaxy. The Guatemalan was later traded for Landon Donovan, who became the prime mover in Galaxy's march to a second MLS crown, in 2005, when they again beat New England Revolution 1-0 thanks to another Guatemalan, Guillermo "Pando" Ramirez. Playing in both of those successes was Cobi Jones, a midfielder who would star for the Galaxy for over a decade and win more than 150 caps for USA.

With average home gates of 20,000,



Star attraction...David Beckham launches a free-kick into the Chivas penalty area

LOS ANGELES MEMORIAL COLISEUM
The only stadium in the world to host the Olympic Games twice, the 93,607-capacity venue was opened in 1923. It staged the Gold Cup Final in 2000 and is sometimes used for non-USA international friendlies.

THE STADIUMS

HOME DEPOT CENTER
Purpose-built in 2003, it holds 27,000 people in fairly intimate surroundings and, as home of Los Angeles Galaxy and CD Chivas USA, it home to the MLS' only groundshare derby, which is known as the Honda SuperClasico. USA's male and female national teams have played here and it also staged the 2003 Women's World Cup Final.

ROSE BOWL
Opened in 1922, this 92,000-capacity temple to gridiron has hosted two World Cup Finals: the men's in 1994 and the women's five years later. The former home ground of both Los Angeles Aztecs and Los Angeles Galaxy, it still stages the occasional match.

Galaxy left the elevated surroundings of the Rose Bowl in 2003 for the purpose-built Home Depot Center in the southern suburb of Carson. Part of a huge sports complex within the grounds of California State University, and site of the US Soccer Federation national team training HQ, this modest 27,000-capacity stadium is also home to Club Deportivo Chivas USA.

An offshoot of CD Guadalajara, one of the most popular teams south of the border, Mexican-owned Chivas play in the same red-and-white stripes as their mother club. They made a modest MLS debut in 2005, but improved dramatically under Bob Bradley, who is now USA national coach.

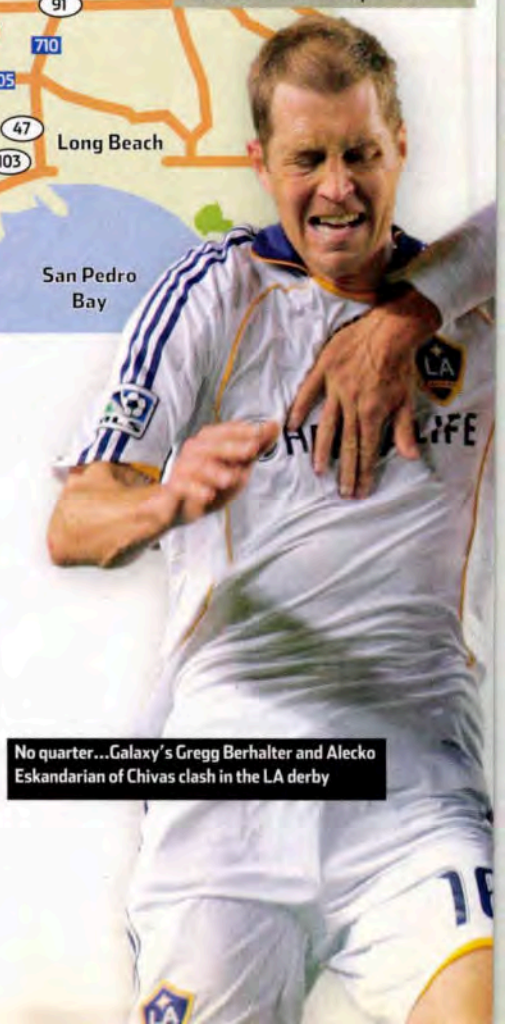
> **"The derby games are no longer mildly entertaining kickabouts"**

Galaxy won the most recent showdown between the pair in June – 23,409 saw Edson Buddle score the only goal of the game – and since the arrival of Beckham, games between Galaxy and Chivas are no longer a mildly entertaining kickabout between clubs representing the entertainment industry and the Latino community. For Beckham's first derby, the $5million-a-year man was kicked in the hip by Jesse Marsch, an MLS ever-present since its inauguration in 1996, with the incident sparking a pitch brawl. In the same fixture in April 2008, fighting broke out in the stands of the Home Depot Center, and on neither occasion did the 34-year-old former England captain stamp his class or authority on the game.

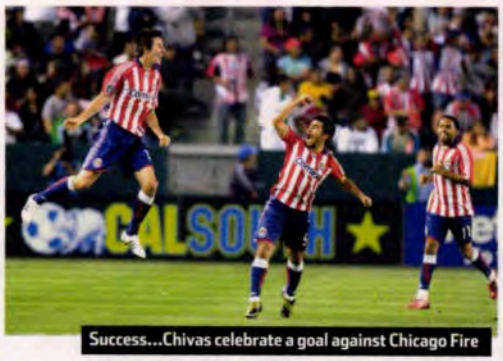
However, Beckham does bring such names as Milan and Barcelona to Los Angeles for the close season – this year Milan play at the HDC, Barca at the Rose Bowl – to show the American public glimpses of the European game in the flesh.

In a recent book, *The Beckham Experiment*, author Grant Wahl revealed the tensions arising from trying to integrate a multimillionaire superstar such as Beckham with mainly modestly-paid journeymen. In it,

Row...Beckham and Chivas' Marsch



No quarter...Galaxy's Gregg Berhalter and Alecko Eskandarian of Chivas clash in the LA derby



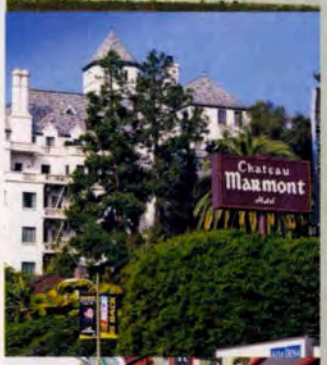
Success...Chivas celebrate a goal against Chicago Fire

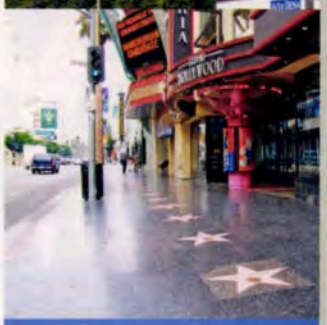
Galaxy stalwart Donovan in particular questions his team-mate's commitment to the cause. Mind you, while Beckham has been criticised for spending the early part of the 2009 MLS season at Milan, it should be pointed out Donovan himself was desperately trying to earn himself a place at Bayern Munich.

The LA jury is still out on the Beckham experiment. Successive coaches Frank Yallop and Ruud Gullit were unable to translate it into success – former national coach Bruce Arena is the latest incumbent – and it eventually led to the downfall of general manager Alexei Lalas.

But even after Beckham has gone, the city is hardly going to be bereft of star players. After all, if any team characterises LA it's the motley collection of expat rock stars and ex-pros of Hollywood United FC – a team who play for charity, companionship and the chance to chat over a pint at the Cat & Fiddle pub on Sunset Boulevard.

LOS ANGELES SURVIVAL GUIDE





LA low-down

● ARRIVAL & TRANSPORT
Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) is 16 miles from the city centre and 13 miles from Carson. Free shuttle buses go to the MTA Bus Center and Aviation/LAX on the Metro Green Line. A taxi to Downtown Los Angeles carries a flat rate of $45.

● HOTELS & INFORMATION
Tourist information and hotel details at www.discoverlosangeles.com

● EATING & DRINKING
Sports Club Bar (21042 Main Street, 1-310 513 8904), Keegan's Pub (1434 Marcelina Ave, Torrance, 1-310 328 3750) and Carson's Sports Bar (18413 Avalon Blvd, 1-310 327 2971) are all good for football, while the Cat & Fiddle (6530 W Sunset Blvd, 1-323 468 3800/www.thecatandfiddle.com) is a Hollywood landmark for rock-star footballers. Santa Monica's Cock & Bull (2947 Lincoln Blvd, 1-310 399 9696) is another football hang-out.

● DAYTIME ENTERTAINMENT
Hollywood tours can be provided by Starline (1-800 959 3131/www.starlinetours.com) and Red Line (1-323 402 1074/www.redlinetours.com). Film studios such as Paramount (5555 Melrose Avenue, 1-323 956 1777/www.paramount.com) and Universal (100 Universal City Plaza, Universal City, 1-800 864 8377/www.universalstudiohollywood.com) provide their own. Shopping malls include the Beverly Center (8500 Beverly Blvd, 1-310 854 0071/www.beverlycenter.com), while the Rose Bowl houses a flea market once a month.

● MATCH DAY
Home Depot Center (18400 Avalon Blvd, 1-310 630 2000/www.homedepotcenter.com) is 13 miles south of central Los Angeles in Carson, on 110 Freeway South. Galaxy fans are known to occupy sections 118, 121, 122, 137 and 138 behind each goal. Chivas' Legionarios fan group also occupy 122, while the Union Ultras get rowdy in 101. Tickets range from $15 to $100. The ticket office (1-310 630 2020/1-877 234 8425) is at the Main Drive at Avalon/184th Street. The Rose Bowl (1001 Rose Bowl Drive, 1-626 577 3101/www.rosebowlstadium.com) in Pasadena is just off Freeway 210, 10 miles north-east of Downtown Los Angeles.

FORTHCOMING FIXTURES

LA GALAXY
Home Depot Center
Aug 1 v Barcelona (Friendly)
Aug 15 v Seattle Sounders
Aug 29 v Chivas USA
Sep 12 v FC Dallas
Sep 19 v Toronto FC

CHIVAS USA
Home Depot Center
Aug 22 v Toronto FC
Aug 29 v LA Galaxy
Sep 13 v New England Revolution
Sep 26 v New York Red Bulls

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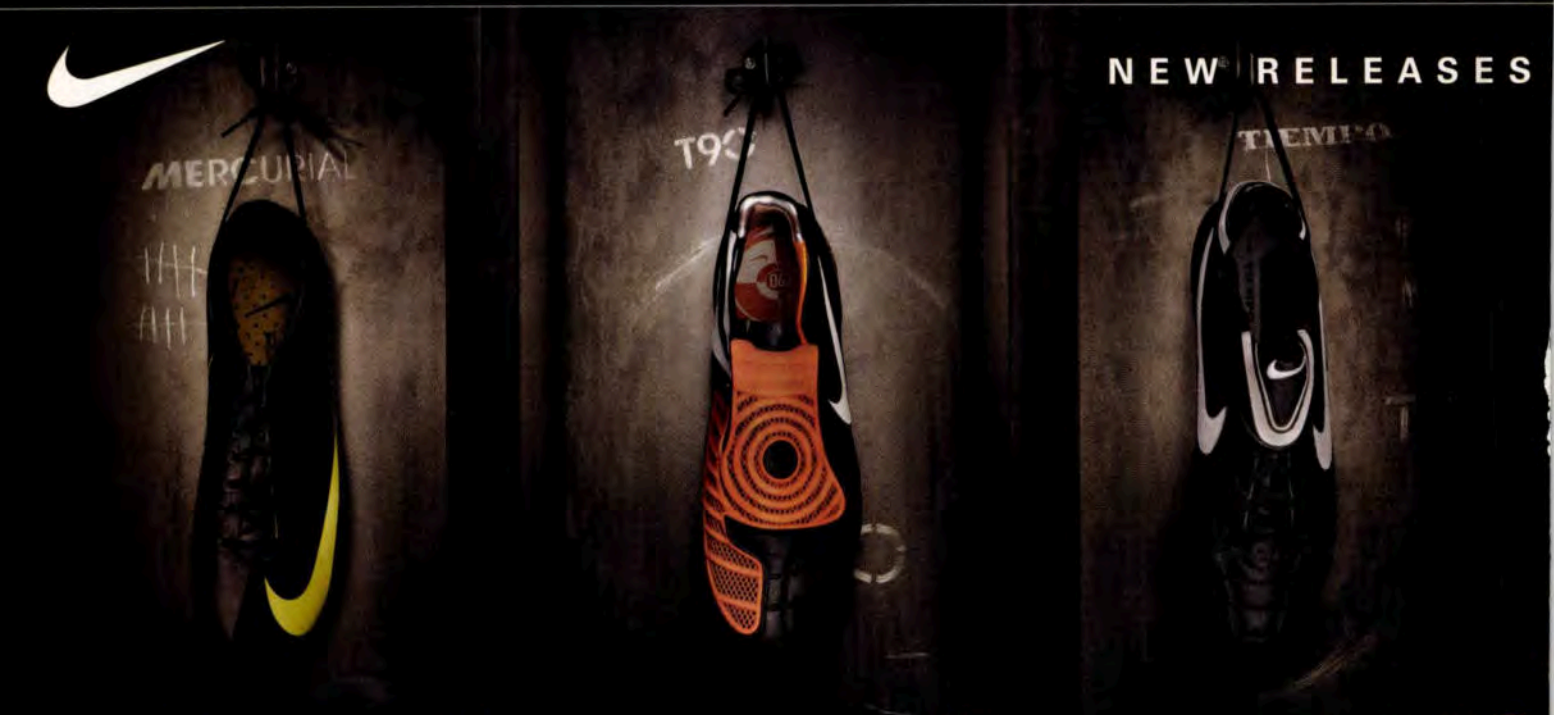

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A striking debut

Australia striker Joshua Kennedy (left) scored on his J.League debut – putting his new club, Nagoya, ahead in their 1-1 draw at home to Kyoto – following his move to Japan from Karlsruhe of Germany. More information and tables, page 113.

INTERNATIONALS

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New role...Le Guen

CAMEROON

Le Guen takes over

Paul Le Guen has replaced Thomas Nkono as coach of the national team.

The 45-year-old Frenchman, who was in charge of Paris Saint-Germain last season, was expected to sign a six-month deal that will see him lead the Indomitable Lions at the African Nations Cup in Angola later this year.

CZECH REPUBLIC

Federation boss Hasek in control

New football federation president Ivan Hasek has taken charge of the national team for the remainder of the World Cup qualifying campaign. The former international midfielder replaces temporary national coach Frantisek Straka, who was dismissed after just a month in the job.

ENGLAND

Brazil friendly date

Fabio Capello's side will play Brazil in Doha, Qatar, on November 14, assuming they are not involved in the World Cup qualifying play-offs.

JAPAN

World Cup warm-up

Having booked their place in next year's World Cup finals,

Going Dutch...Japan's Tulio Tanaka

RESULTS

CONFEDERATIONS CUP

In South Africa

Group A

June 14 - Johannesburg
South Africa 0
Iraq 0
Att: 48,837. **Ref:** Larrionda (Uru)
South Africa: Khune - Masilela, A Mokoena, Booth, Gaxa, Modise, Dikgacoi, Mhlongo, Sibaya, Parker (Pienaar 85), Fanteni (Mashego 78).
Iraq: Mohammed Gassid - Mohammed Ali Karim, Fareed, Ali Rehema, Bassim, Salam, Mahdi (Salih 88), Nashat, Karrar (Hawar 74), Younis, Emad (Alaa 76).

June 14 - Rustenburg
New Zealand 0
Spain 5 (Fernando Torres 6, 14, 17, Fabregas 24, Villa 48)
HT: 0-4. **Att:** 21,649. **Ref:** Codjia (Ben)
New Zealand: Moss - Mulligan, Lochhead, Vicelich, Boyens, Elliott, Brockie (Christie 27), Bertos, Brown, Smeltz (James 76), Killen (Bright 85).
Spain: Casillas - Sergio Ramos (Arbeloa 54), Albiol, Puyol, Capdevila, Xavi (Cazorla 54), Xabi Alonso, Riera, Fabregas, Fernando Torres (Silva 70), Villa.

June 17 - Bloemfontein
Spain 1 (Villa 55)
Iraq 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 30,512. **Ref:** Breeze (Aus)
Spain: Casillas - Sergio Ramos, Pique, Marchena, Capdevila, Xabi Alonso, Mata, Xavi (Busquets 82), Cazorla (Silva 67), Fernando Torres, Villa (Guiza 74).
Iraq: Mohammed Gassid - Salam, Mohammed Ali Karim, Fareed, Ali Rehema, Bassim, Muayad, Samer (Mahdi 60), Nashat, Hawar (Karrar 69), Alaa (Younis 80).

June 17 - Rustenburg
South Africa 2 (Parker 21, 52)
New Zealand 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 36,598. **Ref:** Archundia (Mex)
South Africa: Khune - Gaxa, A Mokoena, Booth, Masilela, Dikgacoi, Sibaya, Pienaar, Parker (S Tshabalala 81), Modise, Fanteni (Mashego 62).
New Zealand: Moss - Mulligan, Boyens, Vicelich, Lochhead, Elliott, Christie, Brown (Oughton 55), Bertos (James 66), Smeltz, Killen (Wood 75).

June 20 - Johannesburg
Iraq 0
New Zealand 0
Att: 23,295. **Ref:** Webb (Eng)
Iraq: Mohammed Gassid - Mohammed Ali Karim, Ali Rehema, Salam, Bassim, Mahdi (Salih 67), Nashat, Hawar (Fareed 46), Karrar, Younis, Emad (Alaa 56).
New Zealand: Moss - Scott (Mulligan 85), Sigmund (Boyens 71), Vicelich, Lochhead, Elliott, Brockie (Christie 68), Bertos, Brown, Smeltz, Killen.

June 20 - Bloemfontein
Spain 2 (Villa 52, Llorente 72)
South Africa 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 38,212. **Ref:** Pozo (Chl)
Spain: Reina - Puyol, Pique, Albiol, Arbeloa, Busquets, Fabregas, Riera (Cazorla 81), Xavi, Villa (Pablo 60), Fernando Torres (Llorente 60).
South Africa: Khune - Gaxa, A Mokoena, Booth, Masilela, Mhlongo, Sibaya (Mashego 83), Pienaar, Dikgacoi, Modise, Parker (S Tshabalala 90).

CONFEDERATIONS CUP – GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain	3	3	0	0	8	0	9
South Africa	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
Iraq	3	0	2	1	0	1	2
New Zealand	3	0	1	2	0	7	1

Group B

June 15 - Bloemfontein
Brazil 4 (Kaka 5, pen 90, Luis Fabiano 12, Juan 37)
Egypt 3 (Zidan 9, 55, Shawky 54)
HT: 3-1. **Att:** 27,851. **Ref:** Webb (Eng)
Brazil: Julio Cesar - Daniel Alves, Juan, Lucio, Kleber (Andre Santos 83), Gilberto Silva, Elano (Ramires 62), Felipe Melo, Kaka, Robinho (Alexandre Pato 62), Luis Fabiano.
Egypt: El Hadary - H Said, Fathy, A Said, Gomaa, Moawad, Shawky, A Hassan (Abdelmalek 51), Abd Rabo (Al Muhammady 75), Aboutraika, Zidan. *Sent off: Al Muhammady 89min.*

June 15 - Pretoria
United States 1 (Donovan pen 41)
Italy 3 (Rossi 58, 90, De Rossi 72)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 34,341. **Ref:** Pozo (Chl)
United States: Howard - Spector, DeMerit, Onyewu, Bornstein (Kljestan 86), Clark, Feilhaber (Beasley 72), Bradley, Dempsey, Altidore (Davies 66), Donovan. *Sent off: Clark 33min.*
Italy: Buffon - Zambrotta, Chiellini, Legrottaglie, Grosso, De Rossi, Gattuso (Rossi 57), Pirlo, Camoranesi (Montolivo 57), Iaquinta, Gilardino (Toni 69).

June 18 - Pretoria
United States 0
Brazil 3 (Felipe Melo 7, Robinho 20, Maicon 62)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 39,617. **Ref:** Busacca (Swi)
United States: Howard - Spector, Onyewu, DeMerit, Bornstein, Bradley, Kljestan, Beasley (Casey 46), Dempsey, Donovan, Altidore (Feilhaber 60). *Sent off: Kljestan 57min.*
Brazil: Julio Cesar - Maicon, Lucio (Luisao 70), Miranda, Andre Santos, Ramires, Gilberto Silva, Felipe Melo, Kaka (Julio Baptista 69), Robinho, Luis Fabiano (Nilmar 69).

June 18 - Johannesburg
Egypt 1 (Soliman 40)
Italy 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 52,150. **Ref:** Hansson (Swe)
Egypt: El Hadary - H Said, Fathy (A Hassan 80), A Said, Gomaa, Moawad (Farag 69), Shawky, Soliman, Aboutraika, Abd Rabo, Zidan (Abdelmalek 57).
Italy: Buffon - Zambrotta, Cannavaro, Chiellini, Grosso, De Rossi, Gattuso (Montolivo 58), Pirlo, Quagliarella (Pepe 64), Rossi (Toni 58), Iaquinta.

June 21 - Pretoria
Italy 0
Brazil 3 (Luis Fabiano 37, 43, Dossena og 45)
HT: 0-3. **Att:** 41,195. **Ref:** Archundia (Mex)
Italy: Buffon - Zambrotta, Cannavaro, Chiellini, Dossena, De Rossi, Montolivo (Pepe 46), Pirlo, Camoranesi, Iaquinta (Rossi 38), Toni (Gilardino 57).
Brazil: Julio Cesar - Maicon, Lucio, Juan (Luisao 24), Andre Santos, Gilberto Silva (Kleberson 84), Ramires (Josue 86), Felipe Melo, Kaka, Robinho, Luis Fabiano.

June 21 - Rustenburg
Egypt 0
United States 3 (Davies 21, Bradley 63, Dempsey 71)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 23,140. **Ref:** Hester (NZ)
Egypt: El Hadary - Fathy (A Said 56), H Said, Gomaa, Farag, Al Muhammady, Shawky, Abd Rabo, Aboutraika, Abdelghany (Abougreisha 62), Abdelmalek (A Hassan 50).
United States: Guzan - Spector, Onyewu, DeMerit, Bornstein, Bradley, Clark, Dempsey, Donovan, Davies (Casey 82), Altidore (Feilhaber 69).

CONFEDERATIONS CUP – GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brazil	3	3	0	0	10	3	9
United States	3	1	0	2	4	6	3
Italy	3	1	0	2	3	5	3
Egypt	3	1	0	2	4	7	3

Semi-finals

June 24 - Bloemfontein
Spain 0
United States 2 (Altidore 27, Dempsey 74)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 35,369. **Ref:** Larrionda (Uru)
Spain: Casillas - Sergio Ramos, Pique, Puyol, Capdevila, Xabi Alonso, Fabregas (Cazorla 68), Riera (Mata 78), Xavi, Villa, Fernando Torres.
United States: Howard - Spector, Onyewu, Bocanegra, DeMerit, Clark, Bradley, Dempsey (Bornstein 88), Donovan, Davies (Feilhaber 69), Altidore (Casey 83). *Sent off: Bradley 87min.*

June 25 - Johannesburg
Brazil 1 (Daniel Alves 88)
South Africa 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 48,049. **Ref:** Busacca (Swi)
Brazil: Julio Cesar - Maicon, Lucio, Luisao, Andre Santos (Daniel Alves 82), Gilberto Silva, Felipe Melo, Ramires, Kaka, Robinho, Luis Fabiano (Kleberson 90).
South Africa: Khune - Gaxa, Booth, A Mokoena, Masilela, Dikgacoi, Mhlongo, Pienaar (Van Heerden 90+), Modise (Mashego 90), Tshabalala (Mphela 90), Parker.

Third-place play-off

June 28 - Rustenburg
Spain 3 (Guiza 88, 89, Xabi Alonso 107)
South Africa 2 (Mphela 73, 90)
Aet. **HT:** 0-0. **90mins:** 2-2. **Att:** 31,788.
Ref: Breeze (Aus)
Spain: Casillas - Arbeloa, Albiol, Pique, Capdevila, Xabi Alonso, Cazorla, Riera, Busquets (Llorente 81), Villa (Silva 57), Fernando Torres (Guiza 57).
South Africa: Khune - Gaxa, Booth, A Mokoena, Masilela, Dikgacoi, Sibaya, Pienaar (Mphela 64), Modise (Van Heerden 69), S Tshabalala (Mhlongo 84), Parker.

Final

June 28 - Johannesburg
United States 2 (Dempsey 10, Donovan 27)
Brazil 3 (Luis Fabiano 46, 74, Lucio 84)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 52,291. **Ref:** Hansson (Swe)
United States: Howard - Spector, Onyewu, Bocanegra, DeMerit, Clark (Casey 88), Feilhaber (Kljestan 75), Dempsey, Donovan, Davies, Altidore (Bornstein 75).
Brazil: Julio Cesar - Maicon, Lucio, Luisao, Andre Santos (Daniel Alves 67), Gilberto Silva, Felipe Melo, Ramires (Elano 67), Kaka, Robinho, Luis Fabiano.

CONCACAF GOLD CUP

Full results and line-ups in next month's issue

FRIENDLIES

Sunday, June 14

June 14 - Mahajanga
Madagascar 2 (Rabeasimbola 75, Solomanana 88)
Mayotte 0
HT: 0-0

Friday, June 19

June 19 - Port-au-Prince
Haiti 1 (Merceus 74)
Panama 1 (Machado 84)
HT: 0-0

June 19 - Manzini
Swaziland 1 (Mthethwa 74)
Lesotho 1 (Tale 72)
HT: 0-0

Sunday, June 21

June 21 - Lobamba
Swaziland 1 (Bhembe 83)
Lesotho 1 (Mokhele 41)
HT: 0-1

Tuesday, June 23

June 23 - Saint-Marc
Haiti 0
Martinique 0

Wednesday, June 24

June 24 - Atlanta, USA
Mexico 4 (Vela 45, Giovani 47, 50, Arellano 72)
Venezuela 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 40,000. **Ref:** Vaughn (USA)
Mexico: G Ochoa - J A Castro, I Rodriguez, Magallon, Pinto, Torrado, Noriega, Martinez, Giovani (Esquivel 71), Vela (Arellano 61), Sabah (Bravo 58).
Venezuela: Romo - Boada (Chacon 65), Salazar, Perozo, Yeguez (Fajardo 55), Rincon, Flores, Di Giorgi (Fernandez 86), Seijas, Moreno (Lezama 88), Maldonado (S Rondon 81).

Saturday, June 27

June 27 - San Jose
Costa Rica 1 (Saborio 38)
Venezuela 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Zelaya (Hnd)
Costa Rica: R Gonzalez - Fernandez, Wallace (Herrera 46), Umana (Segares 46), Centeno (E Granados 46), Sirias (W Granados 73), Oviedo (Arias 60), L Gonzalez, Herron, Ledezma (Alonso 46), Saborio. *Sent off: Segares 83min.*
Venezuela: Romo - Chacon (Fajardo 81), Perozo (Boada 44), Salazar, Yeguez (Pernia 66), Rincon, Di Giorgi (Acosta 74), Seijas, Fernandez (Flores 60), S Rondon (Lezama 71), Del Valle. *Sent off: Seijas 53min.*

June 27 - Montreal, Canada
Haiti 1 (Saint-Preux 29)
Syria 2 (Al Zeno 8, Al Khateeb 26)
HT: 1-2

Sunday, June 28

June 28 - Grand Cayman
Cayman Islands 1 (Carter 40)
Jamaica 4 (Bayliss 22, Wolfe 43, Daley 68, Morrison 82)
HT: 1-2. **Ref:** Holder (Cay)
Jamaica: Miller (Kerr 66) - C Davis, Damion Stewart (Breakenridge 68), A Reid, Wolfe (Simpson 46), Bayliss (Vernan 81), Edwards, Morrison, Shelton, Fuller (Boyd 73), Hodges (Daley 55).

Takeshi Okada's side will play overseas friendlies against Holland on September 5 and Ghana on September 9, with both games taking place on Dutch soil.

LAOS

Riedl joins Under-23s for upcoming Games

Former Vietnam and Palestine coach Alfred Riedl has signed a seven-month contract to coach the country's Under-23 team at the Southeast Asian Games in December.

Laos leader...Riedl

MALTA

National double act

Two former internationals, defender John Buttigieg and midfielder Carmel Busuttil, have taken charge of the national team after Dusan Fitzel stepped down for personal reasons.

MOROCCO

Lions lose Lemerre

Roger Lemerre has been sacked as national coach after just one year in charge of the Atlas Lions.

PALESTINE

Bezaz is the new boss

Frenchman Moussa Bezaz has taken over the national team, replacing Izzat Hamzah.

All over...Lemerre

June 28 - St George's
Grenada 2 (Charles 14, Daniel 77)
Antigua & Barbuda 2 (G Gregory 33, R Gregory 90)
HT: 1-1

June 28 - San Diego, USA
Mexico 0
Guatemala 0
Ref: Navarro (Can)
Mexico: Corona - Juarez, Duenas, Valenzuela, Pinto (Martinez 46), I Castro, Noriega (Esquivel 65), A Medina, Cardenas (Vela 84), Arellano (Barrera 46), Bravo (Sabah 60).

June 28 - Cary, USA
Panama 0
Honduras 2 (Lalin 21, Norales 54)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 3,766
Honduras: Canales - Norales, Chavez, Medina, C Palacios, Delgado (Castillo), M Valladares (Acevedo), W Martinez (Mejia), Lalin, Welcome, Costly (Molina).

Tuesday, June 30
June 30 - Oxnard, USA
Canada 3 (Gerba 4, pen 67, Bernier 55)
Guatemala 0
HT: 1-0
Canada: Wagenaar (Sutton 46) - Stalteri, Jakovic (Hastings 46), McKenna (Cann 80), Klukowski, Johnson (Nakajima-Farran 66), De Guzman (Bernier 42), Hutchinson, De Jong (Simpson 46), Peters (Jackson 56), Gerba.

Sunday, July 5
July 5 - Gaborone
Botswana 1 (Mokgathi 30)
Iran 1 (Shirvand 3)
HT: 1-1

Monday, July 6
July 6 - Blantyre
Malawi 3 (Maziya og 19, Wadabwa 43, 86)
Swaziland 1 (Mkhulisi pen 77)
HT: 2-0

Friday, July 10
July 10 - Arbil
Iraq 3 (Hawar 19, Younis 55, Louay 89)
Palestine 0
HT: 1-0

Sunday, July 12
July 12 - Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia 4 (Safiq pen 44, Indra Putra 49, Farderin 85, Norshahrul 88)
Zimbabwe 0
HT: 1-0

July 12 - Mamoudzou
Mayotte 2 (Ben Ahmed 75, 90)
Madagascar 2 (Rakotondramanana, Tsaralaza 29)
HT: 0-2

July 12 - Basseterre
St Kitts & Nevis 2 (Lake 48, Williams 62)
Trinidad & Tobago 3 (Abu Bakr 21, Guerra 27, K Baptiste 72)
HT: 0-2
Trinidad & Tobago: Phillip - Abu Bakr, K Thomas, Cupid, Edwards, Noel, Guerra (Latapy 74), Tinto, Hector (Leon), Jorsling (Toussaint), K Baptiste.

Monday, July 13
July 13 - Baghdad
Iraq 4 (Hawar 28, Karrar 58, Alaa 73, Emad pen 90)
Palestine 0
HT: 1-0

WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

AFRICA
3rd stage

Group winners qualify for finals (hosts South Africa qualified automatically)

Group A

WC QUALS: AFRICA – 3RD STAGE – GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gabon	2	2	0	0	5	1	6
Togo	3	1	1	1	1	3	4
Morocco	3	0	2	1	1	2	2
Cameroon	2	0	1	1	0	1	1

Group B

WC QUALS: AFRICA – 3RD STAGE – GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tunisia	3	2	1	0	4	1	7
Nigeria	3	1	2	0	3	0	5
Kenya	3	1	0	2	3	6	3
Mozambique	3	0	1	2	1	4	1

Group C

July 5 - Cairo
Egypt 3 (Aboutraika 66, 90, Abd Rabo pen 77)
Rwanda 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 18,000. **Ref:** Imiere (Nig)
Egypt: El Hadary - Al Muhammady, Gomaa, H Said, Fathallah, Moawad (Tawfik 73), Shawky (Raouf 42), Soliman, Abd Rabo, Aboutraika, Zidan (Abdelmalek 53).
Rwanda: Ndori - Ndikumana, Mutesa, Kouame (Ngaboyisibo 78), Sadou, Kapet, Gasana, Ntaganda (Eale 78), Mugiraneza, Niyonzima, Karekezi.
Sent off: Gasana 88min.

WC QUALS: AFRICA – 3RD STAGE – GROUP C	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Algeria	3	2	1	0	5	1	7
Egypt	3	1	1	1	5	4	4
Zambia	3	1	1	1	2	3	4
Rwanda	3	0	1	2	0	4	1

Group D

WC QUALS: AFRICA – 3RD STAGE – GROUP D	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ghana	3	3	0	0	5	0	9
Mali	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Benin	3	1	0	2	2	4	3
Sudan	3	0	1	2	1	4	1

Group E

WC QUALS: AFRICA – 3RD STAGE – GROUP E	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ivory Coast	3	3	0	0	10	3	9
Burkina Faso	3	2	0	1	7	5	6
Guinea	3	1	0	2	5	7	3
Malawi	3	0	0	3	1	8	0

ASIA

Top two in the two 4th stage groups – Australia and Japan (Group 1), and South Korea and North Korea (Group 2) – qualified for finals. The third-placed countries (Bahrain and Saudi Arabia) will meet in a play-off, the winners of which will meet New Zealand, the Oceania section winners, for a place in finals

CONCACAF
4th stage

Top three qualify for finals. Fourth-placed country will meet fifth-placed South American country for a place in finals

WC QUALS: CONCACAF – 4TH STAGE	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Costa Rica	5	4	0	1	9	5	12
United States	5	3	1	1	10	6	10
Honduras	5	2	1	2	6	6	7
Mexico	5	2	0	3	6	8	6
El Salvador	5	1	2	2	6	7	5
Trinidad & Tob	5	0	2	3	6	11	2

EUROPE

Group winners qualify for finals. The best eight runners-up will meet in four play-off ties, the winners of which will also qualify for finals

Group 1

WC QUALS: EUROPE – GROUP 1	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Denmark	6	5	1	0	13	2	16
Hungary	6	4	1	1	8	2	13
Portugal	6	2	3	1	8	4	9
Sweden	6	2	3	1	6	2	9
Albania	8	1	3	4	4	8	6
Malta	8	0	1	7	0	21	1

Group 2

WC QUALS: EUROPE – GROUP 2	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Greece	6	4	1	1	12	4	13
Switzerland	6	4	1	1	11	6	13
Latvia	6	3	1	2	10	6	10
Israel	6	2	3	1	10	8	9
Luxembourg	6	1	1	4	3	13	4
Moldova	6	0	1	5	2	11	1

Group 3

WC QUALS: EUROPE – GROUP 3	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slovakia	6	5	0	1	17	6	15
N Ireland	7	4	1	2	12	6	13
Poland	6	3	1	2	18	7	10
Czech Rep	6	2	2	2	6	4	8
Slovenia	6	2	2	2	5	4	8
San Marino	7	0	0	7	1	32	0

Group 4

WC QUALS: EUROPE – GROUP 4	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Germany	6	5	1	0	18	4	16
Russia	6	5	0	1	12	3	15
Finland	6	3	1	2	8	10	10
Wales	7	3	0	4	5	7	9
Azerbaijan	5	0	1	4	0	5	1
Liechtenstein	6	0	1	5	1	15	1

Group 5

WC QUALS: EUROPE – GROUP 5	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain	6	6	0	0	13	2	18
Bosnia-Herz	6	4	0	2	18	7	12
Turkey	6	2	2	2	6	5	8
Belgium	6	2	1	3	10	11	7
Estonia	6	1	2	3	5	15	5
Armenia	6	0	1	5	3	15	1

Group 6

WC QUALS: EUROPE – GROUP 6	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
England	7	7	0	0	26	4	21
Croatia	6	3	2	1	12	6	11
Ukraine	6	3	2	1	9	6	11
Belarus	5	3	0	2	14	7	9
Kazakhstan	7	1	0	6	7	22	3
Andorra	7	0	0	7	2	25	0

Group 7

WC QUALS: EUROPE – GROUP 7	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Serbia	7	6	0	1	15	5	18
France	5	3	1	1	7	6	10
Lithuania	7	3	0	4	6	6	9
Austria	6	2	1	3	7	9	7
Romania	6	2	1	3	7	10	7
Faroe Islands	5	0	1	4	1	7	1

Group 8

WC QUALS: EUROPE – GROUP 8	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Italy	6	4	2	0	9	3	14
Rep Ireland	7	3	4	0	8	5	13
Bulgaria	6	1	5	0	6	4	8
Cyprus	6	1	2	3	6	9	5
Montenegro	6	0	4	2	5	8	4
Georgia	7	0	3	4	4	9	3

Group 9

WC QUALS: EUROPE – GROUP 9	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Holland (Q)	7	7	0	0	16	2	21
Scotland	5	2	1	2	4	6	7
Macedonia	6	2	1	3	4	7	7
Iceland	7	1	1	5	6	12	4
Norway	5	0	3	2	2	5	3

OCEANIA

Section winners New Zealand will meet fifth-best Asian country for a place in finals

SOUTH AMERICA

Top four qualify for finals. Fifth-placed country will meet the fourth-placed CONCACAF country for a place in finals

WC QUALS: SOUTH AMERICA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brazil	14	7	6	1	25	6	27
Chile	14	8	2	4	23	14	26
Paraguay	14	7	3	4	20	13	24
Argentina	14	6	4	4	19	15	22
Ecuador	14	5	5	4	18	20	20
Uruguay	14	4	6	4	23	16	18
Colombia	14	4	5	5	7	11	17
Venezuela	14	5	2	7	17	24	17
Bolivia	14	3	3	8	19	30	12
Peru	14	1	4	9	7	29	7

Q (in tables) = qualified for finals

Off to a flyer...Castro opens the scoring for Germany in the Final

EUROPE Clean sweep for Germany

EUROPEAN UNDER-21 CHAMPIONSHIP

THE legacy of Germany's record-breaking feat of becoming simultaneous holders of Europe's three age-group titles – Under-17, Under-19 and now Under-21 – may not be felt at next year's World Cup finals, but come 2014 the significance may be profound.

What other nation, with the possible exception of Brazil, can boast such a depth of youthful talent emerging from its ranks? And what other country, for that matter, possesses a coach such as Horst Hrubesch who, not content with leading the Under-19s and Under-21s to their successes, will now go for further glory at the World Under-20 finals in Egypt later this year? Not bad for a former barnstorming striker who hardly looked a sophisticated coach in the making when he thundered in the goals that gave West Germany's seniors the 1980 European title in Italy.

Hrubesch will not, of course, be drawn on what the future holds for his promising youngsters but he is fully aware of their enormous potential.

"The 2010 World Cup will probably come too early for most of these players' development. But after that, who knows?" he smiled after his Under-21 side had crushed England 4-0 in the Final in Malmo.

Yet some of the victorious squad have already made their mark on the senior team, most notably Mesut Ozil, who chose Germany over Turkey – the country of his parents' birth. A smooth operator – linking adroitly with Mats Hummels, who played just in front of the back four, and his captain Sami Khedira – Ozil's 48th-minute free-kick, which utterly deceived England's deputy goalkeeper Scott Loach for Germany's second goal, was the decisive moment of the Final.

The Bremen schemer had already provided the astute through ball to Gonzalo Castro that led to the first German goal and he was again the creator – this time with a crossfield pass – when Sandro Wagner rifled in the first of his two late goals. The second, curled in exquisitely with his right foot, epitomised the confidence of Germany's one recognised striker, albeit one who had hitherto failed to score during the finals.

What the unfortunate Rouwen Hennings made of it all from afar is anyone's guess. He had finished joint-top scorer in the qualifying tournament with seven goals but did not even make the Germany squad for the finals. Yet who could blame Hrubesch since Hennings was scarcely match fit, having seldom played for St Pauli following his loan move from city rivals Hamburg.

Germany played with an understanding that England could only sporadically match in their first Final in any age group for 16 years. However, winger Adam Johnson, midfielders Lee Cattermole, Mark Noble and James Milner, and the left-back Kieran Gibbs all showed promise for England, as did Joe Hart in goal, until his senseless act of gamesmanship in the semi-final shoot-out against Sweden meant he missed the Final – along with suspended strikers Fraizer Campbell and Gabriel Agbonlahor.

Football's enduring perversity had manifested itself in Group B when England's second string tested Germany far more than the first-choice XI were to do a week later. The 1-1 draw enabled both teams to qualify at the expense of Spain, whose initial goalless draw with Germany was one of the tournament's highlights.

Spain included such luminaries as Bojan Krkic, deemed good enough to appear for Barcelona in the Champions League Final, and Jurado, whose goals on loan for Real Mallorca had taken the Balearic Islanders clear of the near certainty of relegation into the top half of La Liga. However, Lopez Caro's side were up against it once England had stolen their thunder with a 2-0 win.

Finland made up the group, losing all three games without experiencing the kind of embarrassing scoreline that was to befall England, in the Final, and Belarus, who lost their opening Group A game 5-1 to their Swedish hosts.

Marcus Berg, who scored a hat-trick in that game and two more in the dramatic 3-3 draw with England in the semi-final – when he also missed a penalty in the shoot-out – finished as the tournament's top scorer with seven goals. Serbia, the other opponents to succumb to Berg's power, let frustration get the better

Suspended...Hart

of them and were down to nine men by the time their elimination was confirmed with a 3-1 defeat in group A.

Despite scoring five goals less than Sweden in their three games, Italy topped their group but a lack of firepower cost them in the semi-finals when Germany won with an Andreas Beck goal against the run of play.

Nicholas Harling

RESULTS

GROUP A

June 16: Sweden 5 Belarus1; Italy 0 Serbia 0.
June 19: Sweden 1 Italy 2; Belarus 0 Serbia 0.
June 23: Serbia 1 Sweden 3; Belarus 1 Italy 2.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Italy	3	2	1	0	4	2	7
Sweden	3	2	0	1	9	4	6
Serbia	3	0	2	1	1	3	2
Belarus	3	0	1	2	2	7	1

GROUP B

June 15: England 2 Finland 1; Spain 0 Germany 0.
June 18: Germany 2 Finland 0; Spain 0 England 2.
June 22: Finland 0 Spain2; Germany 1 England 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
England	3	2	1	0	5	2	7
Germany	3	1	2	0	3	1	5
Spain	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
Finland	3	0	0	3	1	6	0

SEMI-FINALS

June 26:
Italy 0 Germany1;
England 3 Sweden 3 (aet; England won 5-4 on pens).

FINAL

Malmo, June 29, 2009
Germany 4 (Castro 23, Ozil 48, Wagner 79, 84)
England 0
HT: 1-0. Att: 18,769.
Ref: Kuipers (Hol)
GERMANY: Neuer - Beck, Howedes, Boateng, Boenisch - Hummels (Aogo 83) - F Johnson (Schwaab 69), Castro, Khedira, Ozil (Schmelzer 89) - Wagner.
Coach: Hrubesch.
ENGLAND: Loach - Crainie (Gardner 79), Richards, Onuoha (Mancienne 46), Gibbs - Cattermole, Muamba (Rodwell 78), Noble - Milner, Walcott, A Johnson.
Coach: Pearce.

PEOPLE in the news

Sven takes County challenge

He's back...Eriksson

EUROPE

In a surprise appointment, former England and Mexico coach SVEN GORAN ERIKSSON became the new director of football at English League Two side Notts County, who are the oldest professional football club in the world. He described the five-year deal as "the biggest football challenge of my life". County were recently acquired by Middle Eastern owners, but Eriksson denied his decision had been motivated by financial considerations. "I'm not here for money, I am here for the challenge," he said.

Chelsea chief scout and director of youth and development FRANK ARNESEN was promoted to the role of sporting director at Stamford Bridge.

Roma striker VINCENZO MONTELLA terminated his contract, which still had a year to run, and announced his retirement from the game. "Sometimes you have to find the strength to stop," said the 35-year-old who won 20 caps for Italy. He now takes on a technical role in Roma's youth system.

Former Liverpool player and manager KENNY DALGLISH returned to the club to take up a senior role in the Premier League club's Academy.

Arminia Bielefeld left-back TOBIAS RAU, who won seven caps for Germany, announced his retirement, aged 27, following a succession of injuries.

A month after stepping down from his position, Valencia president VICENTE SORIANO regained control of the debt-ridden club as head of a group of investors who he claims are set to inject £400million.

The recently retired Milan and Italy defender PAOLO MALDINI turned down an invitation to join the coaching staff at Chelsea.

Montenegro FA president DEJAN SAVICEVIC was re-elected and will serve another four-year term.

AFRICA

Barcelona midfielder YAYA TOURE was voted Ivory Coast player of the year. The 26-year-old also won the award in 2008.

SHACKMAN TAURO, who played for CAPS United Chiefs and Zimbabwe in the 1970s, died, aged 49.

HAMMADOUN KOLADO CISSE succeeded SALIF KEITA as president of the Mali Football Federation.

ASIA

Bochum striker VAHID HASHEMIAN joined MEHDI MAHDAVIKIA and ALI KARIMI in announcing his retirement from international football following Iran's failure to qualify for next year's World Cup finals.

Former Premier League match official ALAN WILKIE has been employed by the Japan Football Association to help raise refereeing standards. He is best remembered as the ref who sent off Manchester United's Eric Cantona for kicking a supporter at Crystal Palace in 1995.

RANKO POPOVIC replaced PERICLES CHAMUSCA as coach of Oita following the Japanese club's 14th consecutive defeat in the league.

Portuguese coach JAIME PACHECO signed a one-year deal with King's Cup winners Al Shabab of Saudi Arabia.

Uruguayan coach JORGE DA SILVA joined Al Nassr of Saudi Arabia from Defensor Sporting in his homeland.

Al Jazira broke the UAE transfer record to sign Brazil striker RICARDO OLIVEIRA from Spanish club Real Betis for £12million.

OCEANIA

Fijian referee LEONE RAKOROI, who officiated at the Under-17 World Cup in 2003, died in a car accident when returning home from celebrations to mark Navua's victory in the Fijian Cup.

URUGUAY Nacional win marathon final

AFTER they both went out of the Libertadores Cup in successive rounds to eventual winners Estudiantes of Argentina, Nacional ended the domestic league season on a high by beating Defensor in the Primera play-off Final.

Well coached by Gerardo Pelusso, Nacional regained the form of their opening tournament success when it mattered most, and in goalkeeper Rodrigo Munoz, defender Sebastian Coates, young midfield creator Nicolas Lodeiro and striker Santiago Garcia they had the competition's outstanding performers.

Having beaten Nacional 3-2 on the way to winning the closing tournament, the momentum should have been with Defensor. However, Nacional won the play-off semi-final between the apertura and clausura winners to set up a Final play-off – again against Defensor, who finished top of the combined standings.

Coach Pelusso, who had previously won the league title with Danubio in 2004 and the Peruvian championship with Alianza in 2006, resigned the day after steering Nacional to their 42nd title. The club's youth coach, Luis Gonzalez, was put in charge for the six-team Libertadores play-off league, in which Nacional line-up alongside Defensor, Cerro, Liverpool, River Plate and Racing, with the top two going through to South America's premier club competition next year.

Meanwhile, Penarol continue to struggle, and they failed to find any of the form that once made them one of the world's leading teams. Poor performances and bad results ended with supporters venting their frustration with violent attacks on rival fans. After their 1-0 defeat by Defensor in mid-March – when their target was a group of women and children outside the Centenario stadium – mounted police had to intervene and a dozen people were arrested.

The championship was halted briefly after earlier crowd violence at the game between Nacional and Danubio in November, and there were two further interruptions: one in December over security issues at Danubio's ground for a match with Penarol, and then because of a players' strike in March.

These incidents meant that the apertura ended two months later than scheduled and the clausura had to follow on immediately afterwards – with 15 teams instead of the usual 16 after Villa Espanola were relegated for non-payment of debts.

Rex Gowar

Feeling champion...Diego Arismendi and Adrian Romero celebrate Nacional's title

PLAYER OF THE TOURNAMENT
NICOLAS LODEIRO (Nacional)
Creative midfielder who was usually at the heart of his side's best moves and scored the winning goal in the deciding match.

COACH OF THE TOURNAMENT
GERARDO PELUSSO (Nacional)
Won his extended duel with Jorge Da Silva of Defensor after starting the marathon series of finals as underdogs. Defensor were unable to win any of their five meetings.

Farewell triumph...Pelusso

PRIMERA - CLOSING - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Defensor	14	11	1	2	29	15	34
River Plate	14	9	3	2	32	17	30
Cerro	14	9	2	3	30	13	29
Liverpool	14	7	4	3	23	17	25
Penarol	14	7	2	5	22	15	23
Nacional	14	6	5	3	27	21	23
Racing	14	6	5	3	22	17	23
Wanderers	14	6	3	5	25	24	21
Cerro Largo	14	5	4	5	20	20	19
Danubio	14	4	3	7	20	24	15
C Espanol	14	3	3	8	16	24	12
Tacuarembo	14	2	6	6	16	25	12
Bella Vista	14	2	4	8	16	28	10
Juventud	14	2	2	10	15	34	8
Rampla Jrs	14	0	5	9	15	34	5

CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFF

SEMI-FINAL
June 21: Defensor 1 Nacional 1
July 5: Nacional 1 Defensor 1
July 8: Defensor 0 Nacional 3

FINAL
July 12: Defensor 1 Nacional 2
July 15: Nacional 2 Defensor 1

ARGENTINA

Flying high...Pastore

PLAYER OF THE SEASON
JAVIER PASTORE (Huracan)
Teenage midfielder who emerged as the club's most effective player, earning a move to Italy's Palermo on the back of his performances.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
NICOLAS OTAMENDI (Velez Sarsfield)
A 21-year-old defender who obtained the highest average match ratings from the sports daily *Ole*. Made his international debut in a friendly against Panama in May.

PRIMERA - CLOSING - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Velez	19	11	7	1	29	13	40
Huracan	19	12	2	5	35	19	38
Lanus	19	12	2	5	32	26	38
Colon	19	10	4	5	29	19	34
Racing Club	19	8	6	5	23	21	30
Estudiantes	19	8	5	6	22	18	29
Gimnasia LP	19	7	7	5	23	21	28
River Plate	19	7	6	6	24	25	27
Godoy Cruz	19	7	5	7	23	26	26
Rosario	19	7	4	8	23	21	25
San Lorenzo	19	7	3	9	27	26	24
Banfield	19	6	5	8	25	25	23
Tigre	19	6	5	8	24	25	23
Boca Juniors	19	6	4	9	22	25	22
Newell's	19	4	9	6	21	22	21
Independiente	19	6	3	10	22	36	21
San Martin (R)*	19	5	5	9	20	23	20
Arsenal	19	4	6	9	19	30	18
Gimnasia J (R)*	19	4	5	10	15	24	17
Argentinos Jrs	19	2	9	8	19	32	15

**Relegation determined by average points gained over three most recent seasons*

COACH OF THE SEASON
ANGEL CAPPA (Huracan)
Former assistant and close confidant of Cesar Menotti whose all-out attacking tactics earned widespread praise.

BOLIVIA Bolivar crown in doubt

BOLIVAR won the opening championship by one point from Real Potosi to claim a record 16th league title, and their first in three years since taking the 2006 closing championship.

However, there is a chance that they could be stripped of their crown after bottom team Real Mamore protested that the champions fielded an ineligible player when the met in their final match of the season.

The home side claimed that Bolivar's on-loan Argentinian defender Augusto Mainguyague's contract had ended on June 30, five days before the match was played.

The case is most likely to be drawn out over several months while the clubs wait for a decision by the federation, followed by any subsequent appeal.

Bolivar secured the title with virtually with the last kick of the season. Real Potosi – who won 4-1 away to outgoing champions Aurora, who had three men sent off – must have thought the title was theirs with Mamore holding Bolivar 1-1 until Charles Da Silva scored the visitors' winner in injury time.

With three games to go, six teams had been in the running for the title, while two of the country's stronger sides finished in the bottom half of the table – with Blooming ninth and Jorge Wilstermann 11th.

The Strongest – the country's second-most successful club with six titles – replaced Argentinian coach Julio Cesar Toresani with Brazilian midfielder Sandro Coelho after a string of poor results culminated in a 5-1 humiliation by San Jose, but they could still finish only sixth.

Despite the government's revenue office tightening the rules to ensure that all professional players pay their taxes by changing their status to employees from independent workers – with clubs being made responsible for deducting tax at source – three sides, including Aurora, were hit with fines for failing to hand in the requisite documentation.

Meanwhile, Bolivar – whose Uruguayan striker William Ferreira was the tournament's top scorer with 16 goals – immediately began looking ahead to the closing championship by negotiating with Newells' Old Boys to retain on-loan Mainguyague, who was a key component in the league's best defence.

Rex Gowar

PLAYER OF THE TOURNAMENT
ALEJANDRO SCHIAPARELLI (Bolivar)
Argentinian centre-back who marshalled the league's best defence in his first tournament for the club. He continued to play in the final games of the season despite muscle fatigue in his left thigh.

COACH OF THE TOURNAMENT
GUSTAVO QUINTEROS (Bolivar)
The Argentinian steered his side to the title on a limited budget which was carefully administered by the club's owners.

LFPB - OPENING - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bolivar	22	11	7	4	36	22	40
Real Potosi	22	11	6	5	45	31	39
San Jose	22	11	2	9	53	35	35
Oriente	22	10	5	7	33	30	35
Universitario	22	11	3	8	38	27	33
The Strongest	22	9	5	8	36	35	32
La Paz	22	9	5	8	38	39	32
Nacional	22	7	7	8	36	40	28
Blooming	22	7	6	9	24	32	27
Aurora	22	7	5	10	26	33	26
J Wilstermann	22	3	8	11	22	38	17
Real Mamore	22	4	5	13	25	50	17

CHILE U pip Union to the title

URUGUAYAN coach Sergio Markarian was given the best possible send-off by Universidad de Chile as they claimed the opening tournament with victory over Union Espanola, taking the second leg 1-0 away after being held 1-1 in the first leg by the title favourites.

Union Espanola had topped the round-robin phase, finishing seven points clear of second-placed Universidad.

The media often criticised Markarian for being too defensive and they might have had a point when his side tried to defend a 4-1 first-leg lead in the return leg of their quarter-final at home to Audax Italiano and came close to going out as they lost 4-2.

Championship clincher...Olivera (left)

Goalkeeper Miguel Pinto, full-back Jose Contreras and midfield anchor Marco Estrada all stood out for Universidad, who were solid in defence and rarely caught out by counter-attacks.

Union Espanola reached the Final under Luis Hernan Carvallo, who had taken charge last year when the team were in danger of relegation, and they came within half an hour of winning the apertura before Juan Manuel Olivera championship-clinching goal.

Markarian decided during the tournament that he would not stay on after his contract expired at the end of the competition, commenting rather enigmatically: "U doesn't have the conditions of a big team and it's not a problem of the board's."

His suggestion in the media that compatriot and former Chile coach Nelson Acosta, who was in charge of third-placed Everton, was his ideal successor may have been considered by the club but was not taken up; Jose Basualdo, who played for Argentina in the 1990 World Cup Final, landed the job instead.

By the time Basualdo agreed to succeed Markarian he had already lost interest in the play-offs, his Santiago Morning side having conceded their quarter-final 8-1 on aggregate to Universidad Catolica.

Santiago Morning have also lost attacking midfielder Esteban Paredes, the tournament's leading scorer with 16 goals, who has now joined last year's closing champions Colo Colo.

The swine flu scare that started in Mexico and later hit Argentina, also struck football in Chile, with almost a dozen players going down with the virus during the tournament.

Rex Gowar

COACH OF THE TOURNAMENT
JOSE BASUALDO (Santiago Morning)
The former Argentina World Cup midfielder steered Santiago Morning into the apertura play-offs for the first time before landing the prized Universidad de Chile job vacated by Markarian.

PLAYER OF THE TOURNAMENT
ESTEBAN PAREDES (Santiago Morning)
Not an out-and-out striker but the tournament's top scorer with a tally of 16. He has since been snapped up by Colo Colo's new Argentinian coach, Hugo Tocalli, for the closing championship.

PRIMERA - OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
U Espanola	17	12	2	3	38	17	38
Univ de Chile	17	9	4	4	33	21	31
Everton	17	7	7	3	24	17	28
S Morning	17	8	3	6	41	29	27
Univ Catolica	17	8	3	6	26	18	27
Municipal	17	7	5	5	27	23	26
Audax Italiano	17	7	4	6	25	20	25
O'Higgins	17	7	4	6	25	26	25
Huachipato	17	7	4	6	26	29	25
Cobreloa	17	7	3	7	24	25	24
U Concepcion	17	6	5	6	24	25	23
Nublense	17	5	5	7	18	26	20
Colo Colo	17	5	4	8	28	28	19
Curico Unido	17	5	4	8	24	28	19
Cobresal	17	4	7	6	23	34	19
Palestino	17	5	2	10	18	37	17
Rangers	17	3	5	9	20	28	14
Dep La Serena	17	3	5	9	19	32	14

PLAY-OFFS

QUARTER-FINALS
Audax Italiano v Universidad de Chile
1-4, 4-2 (agg 5-6)
Municipal v Everton
2-2, 1-2 (agg 3-4)
O'Higgins v Union Espanola
1-1, 1-6 (agg 2-7)
Universidad Catolica v Santiago Morning
4-0, 4-1 (agg 8-1)

SEMI-FINALS
Union Espanola v Universidad Catolica
0-0, 0-0 (agg 0-0, Union Espanola won 4-2 on penalties)
Everton v Universidad de Chile
1-0, 1-3 (2-3)

FINAL
Universidad de Chile v Union Espanola
1-1, 1-0 (agg 1-2)

COLOMBIA Alvarez triumphs at last

TEN years after a wonderfully entertaining and all-too-brief spell in charge of the Colombia national side, Javier Alvarez bounced back into the spotlight by leading Once Caldas to the opening championship title in his third stint at the club.

The Manizales-based club beat Atletico Junior 5-2 in the two-leg Final to hand the former chemical engineer the first major title of his career.

During the last few years, Alvarez has had some unremarkable stints in charge of Independiente Medellin, Atletico Nacional, Atletico Huila, Deportivo Cali and Ecuador's Aucas. Perhaps not surprisingly, he is a much more subdued figure than the entertaining extrovert who led Colombia at the 1999 Copa America.

On that occasion, buoyed by impressive opening wins over Uruguay and Argentina, Alvarez warned that any opponent that miscalculated their tactics against his side would be taken to the cleaners. He also claimed that his psychic powers had helped goalkeeper Farid Mondragon to save a penalty.

Colombia, however, were thumped 3-2 by Chile in the quarter-finals and Alvarez's reign ended the following year when the Under-23 team were beaten 9-0 by Brazil.

"It doesn't bother me that people talk about this," he recalled. "It was an edifying experience. One has to make the best of everything."

Alvarez had twice led teams to the domestic play-off Final before, but on each previous occasion – with Caldas in 1998 and Deportivo Cali five years later – his team were beaten.

While Alvarez was celebrating some long-overdue success, several other coaches were making headlines for all the wrong reasons.

Cucuta's Jorge Luis Pinto was given a 10-match ban after being sent off against Envigado – his third dismissal of the year. "After he was sent off, he pushed the fourth official, insulted him by using bad language and threatened him several times," said the league's disciplinary committee.

Success...Once Caldas

Pinto was barred from the stadium when his team were playing and he watched home games from the offices of a nearby sports institute, giving his team talk via cctv.

Atletico Junior coach Julio Comesana was banned for five games for using bad language against a referee in the first leg of the play-off Final. He was furious about a Caldas goal that he thought was offside. When it was later proved that he was correct, referee Imer Machado was suspended for five games for allowing the goal.

Referee, Sebastian Valencia was also banned for five games for wrongly awarding Once Caldas a penalty in their 2-1 win over Chico.

Brian Homewood

PLAYER OF THE TOURNAMENT
TEOFILO GUTIERREZ
(Atletico Junior)
The tournament's top scorer with 16 goals, he spearheaded Atletico's attack as his team reached the Final and earned himself an international call-up.

COACH OF THE TOURNAMENT
JAVIER ALVAREZ
(Once Caldas)
After losing his two previous finals, he finally won his first national title at the age of 51.

OPENING - REGULAR - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tolima	18	10	2	6	21	16	32
At Junior	18	9	4	5	30	18	31
Cucuta	18	9	4	5	16	14	31
Chico	18	8	6	4	24	22	30
Dep Cali	18	8	5	5	23	17	29
La Equidad	18	8	5	5	20	18	29
Envigado	18	8	5	5	22	24	29
Once Caldas	18	7	7	4	23	14	28
Quindio	18	7	4	7	23	22	25
Cartagena	18	7	4	7	23	24	25
America	18	7	3	8	24	21	24
Pereira	18	7	3	8	26	25	24
At Huila	18	7	3	8	20	26	24
Ind Santa Fe	18	5	6	7	20	25	21
Millonarios	18	3	8	7	16	20	17
Dep Pasto	18	4	5	9	12	17	17
At Nacional	18	3	7	8	16	25	16
Ind Medellin	18	2	5	11	18	29	11

OPENING – PLAY-OFFS – GROUP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Once Caldas	6	3	1	2	11	10	10
La Equidad	6	2	3	1	5	4	9
Tolima	6	2	2	2	4	4	8

OPENING – PLAY-OFFS – GROUP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
At Junior	6	2	3	1	11	6	9
Dep Cali	6	2	3	1	8	7	9
Cucuta	6	1	3	2	6	9	6
Envigado	6	1	3	2	5	8	6

PLAY-OFF FINAL
Once Caldas v Atletico Junior
2-1, 3-1 (5-2 on agg)

PARAGUAY Cautious Cerro claim title

THE recipe at Cerro Porteno's La Olla (Cooking Pot) stadium was not quite right for their final home game of the opening championship as they were thumped 3-0 by closest rivals Libertad.

Just as well, then, that they had a five-point cushion, albeit one that had suddenly been reduced to just two.

Fortunately Cerro's form on the road had been good all season and a 1-0 win away to 12 de Octubre secured the title, captain Jorge Britez scoring the all-important goal, while Libertad limped across the finishing line with a goalless draw at home to Tacuary.

Cerro, who with Libertad have dominated the Paraguayan game this century, led the tournament from start to finish, having opened their campaign with five wins in a row.

The fact that 10 of their 22 league games were won 1-0 is a reflection of the emphasis their Argentinian coach, Pedro Troglio, puts on defence. The fact that the 44-year-old played every one of his 21 caps – under Carlos Bilardo, a man who always put caution first, explains a lot.

The more adventurous Libertad, who made a slow start to the championship, may have scored almost twice as many goals as Cerro, but Troglio – who had replaced Ossie Ardiles last August – could always rely on goalkeeper Roberto Fernandez, who conceded just 11 goals in 22 matches and has since been snapped up by River Plate of Argentina.

Promoted Rubio Nu, who are coached by former international defender Francisco Arce, were not overawed by their first season in the top flight and ruffled a few feathers away from home, beating Cerro, Olimpia and third-placed Nacional.

At the start of the season, Olimpia had fired coach Ever Almeida after just four games despite being unbeaten. They then lost their next game 1-0 to Rubio Nu, under his replacement Gregorio Perez, and eventually finished fourth, nine points behind Cerro. They have already begun a recruiting drive, signing up Paraguay internationals Carlos Bonet and Julio Manzur, who have been playing in Mexico, for the next instalment of the campaign.

With the closing tournament due to start just weeks after the end of the apertura, moves were under way to postpone the start until the second weekend of August.

Cerro are not pleased that their preparations for the clausura and participation in the Sudamericana Cup have been affected by Paraguay's decision to call up six of their promising young players for the Under-20 team's tour of Venezuela, including defender Ivan Piris who was named the newcomer of 2008.

Rex Gowar

PLAYER OF THE TOURNAMENT
ROBERTO FERNANDEZ
(Cerro Porteno)
***Gatito* (Little Cat) has inherited the agility of his father, 1979 Copa America-winning keeper Roberto *Gata* Fernandez, helping to give Cerro the best defensive record in the clausura.**

COACH OF THE TOURNAMENT
PEDRO TROGLIO
(Cerro Porteno)
Having made his name at Gimnasia La Plata in his native Argentina, he built a side that was very hard to beat, if not high scoring.

PRIMERA - OPENING - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cerro Porteno	22	14	4	4	24	11	46
Libertad	22	12	6	4	46	19	42
Nacional	22	9	9	4	37	23	36
Olimpia	22	9	8	5	31	28	35
Tacuary	22	9	5	8	27	29	32
Sportivo Luqueno	22	8	7	7	26	24	31
Guarani	22	7	8	7	21	17	29
Rubio Nu	22	8	2	12	30	34	26
Sol de America	22	6	7	9	21	30	25
12 de Octubre	22	6	6	10	19	30	24
2 de Mayo	22	4	6	12	23	34	18
3 de Febrero	22	5	2	15	21	47	17

AUSTRIA BUNDESLIGA 2009-10

KEY DATES

Season starts July 17, 2009
Season ends May 13, 2010

DEFENDING champions **Salzburg** will be the team to beat once again as the seemingly endless financial input of energy-drink tycoon Didi Mateschitz means they can afford players no other Austrian side can.

Newly appointed coach Huub Stevens has strengthened his team's midfield, attracting Bosnian playmaker Admir Vladavic (from Zilina of Slovakia) and globetrotter Simon Cziommer (AZ Alkmaar), as well as defensive midfielders Dusan Svento (Slavia Prague) and Thomas Augustinussen (AaB Aalborg). Switzerland international Christian Schwegler (Young Boys) and Franz Schiemer (Austria Wien) were also signed to help stabilise the defence. Up front, top scorer Marc Janko extended his contract but could still leave for the Premier League before the transfer window closes.

Capitalizing on the sizzling atmosphere at the Hanappi Stadium in Vienna, where **Rapid** are almost unbeatable in front of their home fans, last season's runners-up should once again be Salzburg's biggest challengers. But while controversial coach Peter Pacult has brought in Montenegro defender Milan Jovanovic, he looks set to lose one of his main strikers: either Stefan Maierhofer or Erwin "Jimmy" Hoffer, whose lightning speed and ice-cool finishing has attracted interest from Blackburn Rovers, Hamburg and Schalke among others.

"Hoffer is widely known in the Bundesliga and I would love to have him on board," said new Schalke coach Felix Magath when Rapid met the German side in a pre-season friendly.

The potential dark horses of the upcoming season are **Austria Wien**. The capital's posh club have spent a lot of money over the summer "to form a potential champion side", according to general manager Thomas Parits. Following the departures of skipper Jocelyn Blanchard and Fernando Trojansky (both to Austria Karnten), Mario Bazina (Bosnia's Siroki Brijeg) and Schiemer (Saltzberg), they snatched the country's up-and-coming playmaker Zlatko Junuzovic and national team defender Manuel Ortlechner (both from Austria Karnten), midfielders Petr Vorisek (Sparta Prague) and Florian Klein (LASK), Under-21 ace Julian Baumgartlinger (1860 Munich), and Czech strikers Tomas Jun (Teplice) and Michael Liendl (Kapfenberg).

Five-star show...Salzburg new boys Schwegler, Augustinussen, Schiemer, Cziommer and Svento

However, defensive talent Aleksandar Dragovic may still leave the Violets before the window closes.

Former Champions League starters **Sturm** have become Austria's biggest hotbed of talented youngsters. Thanks to head coach Franco Foda, the club has developed players like Werder Bremen's Sebastian Prodl, Torino's Jurgen Saumel and Salzburg's Christoph Leitgeb. The next stars in the making are Daniel Beichler, Jakob Jantscher and Andreas Lukse, while Croat defender Gordon Schildenfeld has come in on loan from Besiktas with the hope of boosting his international hopes.

New generation...Sturm's Jantscher

Ried are labelled as one of the top relegation candidates on an annual basis, but the small-town club have managed to stay in the league for the past four seasons. Head coach Paul Gludovatz, who led Austria's Under-20 side to a sensational semi-final berth at the World Youth Cup in 2007, has formed a compact team around veterans Herwig Drechsel and Oliver Glasner, as well as Spanish striker Nacho, who has helped facilitate the move of fellow countryman Jonathan Carril.

Newly promoted **Magna Wiener Neustadt** will be much stronger than the usual newcomers to the top flight. Thanks to Austro-Canadian billionaire Frank Stronach's money, Magna's squad contains 15 players with top-league experience, including six former internationals. Salzburg's Ronald Gercaliu turned down an offer from Celtic in order to join the newboys and, together with Czech international Pavel Kostal, from Slovan Liberec, he will shape the defence.

LASK, **Austria Karnten**, **Kapfenberg** and **Mattersburg** are all in danger of going down. After team manager Hans Krankl's departure, LASK have suffered another blow with the retirement of club heroes Ivica Vastic and Michael Baur. Former Austrian international Thomas Prager will most likely leave the club, too. Inexperienced new coach Matthias Hamann will miss them dearly.

Although Karnten have had to lower their sights financially since former president Jorg Haider's death, team manager Frank Schinkels has convinced former Austria Wien skipper Blanchard and team-mate Trojansky to join him. Youngster Markus Pink impressed during pre-season and he might become the option up front that Schinkels has been looking for. Pink will be supplied by Malta international Andre Schembri, who is expected to become the Lions's new playmaker.

Despite escaping the drop in their first season in the top flight, Kapfenberg coach Werner Gregoritsch has replaced 12 players. However, with the exception of skipper Michael Liendl (Austria Wien), no key player has left the club. Instead, Gregoritsch closed the most surprising deal of the summer by signing former Czech star Marek Heinz from Brno.

Mattersburg only just managed to stay alive last season and are this year's hottest bet for relegation. Without star striker Carsten Jancker and probably fellow attacker Ilco Naumoski, Mattersburg will be toothless up front.

Harry Miltner

Austria Wien are potential dark horses and have spent a lot of money over the summer

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/austria

BELGIUM JUPILER LEAGUE 2009-10

KEY DATES

Season starts July 31, 2009
Season ends May 2010

THE new league format might be somewhat controversial (with 16 clubs instead of 18 and a full fixture list scheduled for Boxing Day), and key players may have come and gone, but the main prize still looks likely to be handed out to the usual recipients.

By persuading Laszlo Boloni to sign a new one-year contract, **Standard** appear to have given themselves every chance of capturing the championship for a third successive season. Anderlecht were the last to achieve the feat (between 1993 and 1995) but Standard – then playing under the guise of Royal Standard Club Liegeois – have to go all the way back to 1969-71 for their last trio of titles.

The club's change of name in 1972 did not lead to any undue cause for celebration in Liege until the 1982 and 1983 seasons, when Standard were champions two years running, but then came a fallow quarter of a century until former national team goalkeeper Michel Preud'homme coached the club to a long overdue triumph in 2008.

Preud'homme's subsequent departure for a similar post at Gent would possibly have had drastic repercussions but for Boloni's undoubted capacity for maintaining morale in the dressing room.

Brugge is the colour...Donk

The 56-year old Romanian proved just the right man to take up the reins as Standard withstood the challenge of Anderlecht, their eventual victims in last season's two-legged play-off after the clubs had finished level on points.

A former international who was also a European Cup winner with Steaua Bucharest in 1986, Boloni must find a replacement for American defender Oguchi Onyewu if Standard are to remain on top. The 27-year-old, who was a key member of the USA team that reached the Confederations Cup Final in South Africa, has joined Milan on a free transfer after making 179 league appearances during his five years in Liege.

If Standard were dismayed to lose Onyewu, they were overjoyed to beat Porto to the signing of highly-rated midfielder Tiago Ronaldo from Guimares in Portugal. His arrival "was a real windfall", according to Standard's general director Pierre Francois, who added: "He fits perfectly with our policy of signing young talent. He is a player for the future."

Also recruited on a similar two-year contract with a further year's option is Auxerre midfielder Jonathan Mendes. Another intriguing new signing is Moussa Traore, a 19-year-old forward from Commune FC in Burkina Faso.

Standard's closest challengers will again be **Anderlecht**, who have recalled Silvio Proto from his loan spell at Germinal Beerschot now that he has achieved international recognition in goal. Proto is a celebrated figure, not merely because he is one of the few goalscoring goalkeepers in the Belgian league, but because he is also believed to be the only practicing ventriloquist in the game!

Of the mauve and whites' other newcomers, 19-year-old Senegalese attacking midfielder Cheikhou Kouyate returns after a year on loan at Kortrijk, while Czech defender Ondrej Mazuch joins on loan from Fiorentina with a option for a permanent deal. With highly promising Brazilian midfielder Reynaldo Dos Santos Silva being promoted from the reserves, Anderlecht seem to be looking to their youth policy for a return to former glories.

Preud'homme's **Gent** are likely to be among the contenders, all the more so now that they have compensated for the loss of their captain, Costa Rica striker Bryan Ruiz, by spending the money they received from Twente in Holland on Stijn De Smet from Cercle Bruges. The midfielder, who has one cap to his name, has signed a five-year deal.

Multi-talented...Proto

Boloni must find a replacement for American defender Oguchi Onyewu if Standard are to remain on top

Top of the pile...now Boloni looks to steer Standard to a hat-trick of Belgian titles

Club Brugge, who have replaced Jacky Mathijssen with Dutch coach Adrie Koster, may continue to endure a tough transition despite the signing of central defender Ryan Donk from AZ Alkmaar.

Genk, who have a new coach in Hein Vanhaezebrouck, will also be expected to chase the front runners but it is difficult to envisage other new coaches Georges Leekens, Stephane Demol and Miroslav Djukic managing anything remarkable with **Kortrijk**, **Charleroi** and **Mouscron** respectively.

Having narrowly missed out on the European places last season, **Zutte Waregem**, **Westerlo** and **Lokeren** will hope to push on, while **Cercle Brugge** and **Mechelen** – who sold striker Bjorn Vleminckx to NEC for £1.75million, making him the Dutch club's record signing – will look to improve on their mid-table places last term.

Roeselare could struggle if new signing Collins John, the former Fulham striker, does not come up with the goals, as could **Germinal Beerschot** and promoted **St Truiden**.

Nicholas Harling

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/belgium

CZECH REPUBLIC 1 LIGA 2009-10

KEY DATES

Season starts July 25, 2009
Season ends May 22, 2010

HAVING ruled himself out of the national team job to concentrate on leading **Slavia** to a third successive title, coach Karel Jarolim's most pressing concern now is to establish a new front line for the Prague club.

With on-loan striker Pavel Fort returning to Toulouse, Macedonia forward Riste Naumov, from relegated Zizkov, and Stanislav Vlcek, who rejoins from Anderlecht, will need to strike up an early understanding.

Slavia will also miss midfielder Dusan Svento, who has joined Red Bull Salzburg in Austria, but the most surprising departure has been that of team captain Erich Brabec, who was released in the summer – even though the 32-year-old defender was given a new three-and-a-half-year contract in January. He has since joined Ankaraspor in Turkey.

With coach Jozef Chovanec's emphasis on youth beginning to pay off, **Sparta** look best-placed to challenge their city rivals for the title.

The latest batch of talented arrivals include midfielders Marek Strestik from Brno and Lubos Kalouda (CSKA Moscow), forward Martin Jirous (Banik Sokolov) and Austrian defender Niklas Hoheneder (LASK Linz).

The biggest names leaving are Miroslav Matusovic (Apollon Limassol) and Marek Kulic (Mlada Boleslav).

Outside the capital, the strongest title challenge will probably come from **Liberec**, who finished third last season and qualified for the Europa League.

Coach Ladislav Skorpil's biggest worry is keeping Croatian striker Andrej Keric, who was the league's leading scorer last season. However, Skorpil will definitely be without central defender Pavel Kostal, who is joining Austrian side Wiener Neustadt.

End of the argument...Slavia skipper Erich Brabec has left for Turkey

Problems...Liberec coach Skorpil

With Dusan Uhrin Jr back in charge, **Mlada Boleslav** could be contenders, despite striker Michal Papadopulos' departure to Heerenveen. Former international Kulic returns from Sparta to the club where he made his name, joining captain Lubos Pecka and youngster Jan Chramosta in a potent attacking force, while defender Jan Rajnoch returns from a loan spell with Energie Cottbus.

Rumours that **Teplice** might be sold made headlines over the summer and overshadowed a quiet time in the transfer market. Coach Jiri Plisek described the changes to his squad as "cosmetic" but the domestic Cup winners remain one of the stronger sides.

Jablonec finished fifth last season despite a shortfall in sponsorship money and operating under a tighter budget this term the north Bohemian side will do well to match that form, with midfielder Adam Hlousek (Slavia) and defender Josef Hamouz (Austrian club Mattersburg) both moving on.

New **Ostrava** coach Miroslav Koubek has promised drastic changes to a team that, amid reports of financial problems, slumped disastrously last spring. Youngsters and imports, such as South Korean midfielder Lee Hyung-sang and Cape Verdean defender Fernando Maria Neves, must plug the gaps left by the departure of goalkeeper Petr Vasek, defender Lukas Vacha, playmaker Rudolf Otepka and striker David Strihavka.

Remember me?...Rajnoch is back at Boleslav

Plzen have strengthened their hand, bringing in Strihavka (Ostrava), Slovak forward Marek Bakos (Ruzomberok) and midfielder Filip Rydel (Olomouc), while **Olomouc** could struggle to repeat last season's fourth place having lost Brazilian playmaker Melinho to German club Koblenz on loan, and **Brno** must rely on a whole raft of new signings now that former Czech Republic FA chairman Pavel Mokry has been installed as general director and coach Miroslav Beranek is in charge of transfer policy.

Ceske Budejovice owner and former player Karel Poborsky has made survival his side's main priority, and that will be as much as **Kladno**, **Pribram** and **Bohemians Prague** can hope for.

Set up by fans in 2005 when the original club went bankrupt, promoted **Bohemians 1905** are the other Prague club laying claim to the Bohemians legacy.

Relegated after just one season in the top flight in 2007-08, they have bounced back under coach Pavel Hoftych, but the sale of youngster Jan Moravek to Schalke for financial reasons will be a big loss.

Despite being given a new contract, Slavia captain Brabec was released in the summer

Slovacko, who finished 10th in the second division last season, only gained promotion by buying Zenit Caslav's place. The signing of veterans Petr Svancara and Ales Urbanek, plus last season's thrilling run to the Cup Final, offers some hope but the odds seem stacked against them.

Sam Beckwith

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/czechrep

DENMARK SUPERLIGA 2009-10

KEY DATES

Season starts July 18, 2009
Season ends May 16, 2010

FORMED by the merger of two former Danish champions, **HB Koge** had been in existence for just three weeks when this season's Superliga got under way.

Final approval of what the Danes call the "fusion" of football clubs meant that Herfolge Boldklub and Koge BK – who for many years were fierce local rivals on the rural east coast of Sjaelland, 30 miles south of Copenhagen – became the fifth of the 12 Superliga clubs to be started this way.

The twist in this particular deal, however, is that it's very much a case of the smaller club taking over their larger neighbours – Herfolge being a tiny village of 3,000 people, while Koge is the main provincial town.

Koge BK's claim to fame is that, in 1954, they became the first club from outside the capital, Copenhagen, to win the title. Another league triumph followed in 1975, but in recent times they have been overshadowed by Herfolge, who won the Superliga in 2000 under the guidance of coach John Jensen.

HB Koge will play their home matches in Herfolge, while the reserves and juniors will play in Koge's old stadium, the ground where Jon Dahl Tomasson learned his football as a teenager.

How will they fare? Well, Herfolge were winners of the Danish first division last season, and have an inspirational young coach in Auri Skarbalius, a 36-year-old Lithuanian who spent 10 years playing for Brondby, and the boost from the merger may make them more than the mere cannon fodder that is the fate of many teams who are promoted to the top flight.

"The board has not set high goals," said Skarbalius. "But we will try to finish as far up the table as possible. I pay a lot of attention to stamina and technique in training sessions because my philosophy is that if you have possession of the ball then your opponents can't hurt you. We have selfless players and they have shown what they can do."

One of those players is 20-year-old Mads Laudrup, son of Danish legend Michael. However, the youngster is finding it harder than expected to make his way in the game.

Favourites for the Superliga title are undoubtedly **FC Copenhagen** – themselves formed by a merger in 1992 – who have won six of the last nine titles and have by far the strongest squad, with several current Denmark internationals. Coach Stale Solbakken has made no significant additions to the squad so far, although his Brazilian striker Ailton has been the subject of much interest from overseas.

Perhaps the biggest threat to the defending champions will be success in the Champions League, as an extended run could overstretch their resources.

That certainly happened to **AaB** last season as the Aalborg club struggled to cope with the demands of the domestic league and the Champions League group stage. It is hard to see AaB challenging at the top again, though, after an exodus of several influential players, including Thomas Augustinussen to Salzburg, Kasper Risgaard to Arminia Bielefeld of Germany and the return of Siyabonga Nomvete to South Africa to join Moroka Swallows.

HB Koge have been formed by the merger of two former champions, for many years fierce rivals on the rural east coast

In demand...Copenhagen's Ailton

Most pre-season attention has focused on **Brondby,** who fell away badly in the final few games of the last campaign after looking well placed to win the title. Supporters complained that the team was too defensive under new coach Kent Nielsen, but he has rejected the charge, saying: "I do want us to play attacking and entertaining football, but you also have to be realistic. What I have said is that if you have to play five per cent more defensively to make the strongest challenge you can in the Superliga, then I will do that. I don't apologise for that point of view."

Nielsen's first foray into the transfer market backed up his philosophy as he signed veteran Sweden defender Mikael Nilsson from Panathinaikos.

Brondby are certainly the most likely challengers to FC Copenhagen, along with **OB Odense,** who have made steady progress in recent times and finished runners-up last season. They have been very active during the summer, acquiring Heerenveen full-back Timmi Johansen and Brazilian striker Caca from AaB.

The rest of the Superliga are likely to be looking over their shoulders at relegation although older fusion clubs **Midtjylland** and **Nordsjaelland** ought to be safe enough after several seasons of mid-season stability.

However, more danger lies ahead for a raft of clubs, with the two relegation teams likely to come from **Esbjerg, Randers, SonderjyskE, AGF Aarhus** and promoted **Silkeborg**.

Jim Holden

Early days...Hoge's Mikkel Christoffersen and Martin Arlofelt try to keep Rajko Lekic of Silkeborg at bay

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/denmark

GREECE SUPER LEAGUE 2009-10

KEY DATES

Season starts August 22, 2009
Season ends May/June 2010

HAVING claimed the league title 12 times in the past 13 seasons, **Olympiakos** owner Socrates Kokkalis has raised the bar for next season: he now wants European recognition for the Piraeus club.

And this is where new coach Temuri Ketsbaia comes in.

Kokkalis has hired the man who knocked his team out of the Champions League last year, with the 41-year-old Georgian leaving Cypriot club Anorthosis to become Olympiakos' 21st coach in the last 16 years.

Kokkalis made it clear in June when parting company with Ernesto Valverde that winning the Greek league and cup double – as the Spanish coach had just done – does not bring absolute joy to the hard-to-please Olympiakos clan. But a European title certainly will.

The first goal Ketsbaia has set for his new charges is to qualify for the Champions League group stage and during pre-season he has been working on three systems to achieve this: the classic 4-4-2 line-up, the more attacking 4-3-3, and a conservative 4-3-2-1 which will be deployed depending on the opponents and the circumstances.

Joining Olympiakos this season will be Swedish defender Olof Mellberg from Juventus and English forward Matt Derbyshire, who makes permanent last term's loan from Blackburn Rovers.

Full time...Derbyshire (right) has turned last term's loan at Olympiakos into a permanent deal

Former international captain Mellberg, 32, has won 90 caps for his country and he joins for a fee of around £2million. As for Derbyshire, the club paid £2.5m for the 23-year-old striker who became a club hero with his two goals in the Greek Cup Final in May.

Panathinaikos were the last team to stop Olympiakos claiming the title – in 2004 – and they are expected to be their main challengers once again.

Having finished third last season, they took the Super League's second Champions League place by winning the post-season play-off and they have spent the summer adding to their squad.

Their big purchase was France striker Djibril Cisse, who cost £7m from Marseille and becomes the club's best-paid player of all time.

Cisse's arrival in Athens – on Panathinaikos president Nikos Pateras' private jet – was greeted by 3,000 of the club's supporters at the airport and the 28-year-old commented: "I am very enthusiastic about the welcome and I have not witnessed anything like it in my life. I really didn't expect or imagine it."

Olympiakos owner Socrates Kokkalis is demanding European recognition

Panathinaikos also picked up Argentinian midfielder Sebastian Leto – who spent last term on loan at Olympiakos – from Liverpool for £3.5m, national midfielder Kostas Katsouranis from Benfica for £2.5m and Mali defender Cedric Kante from Nice.

Polish defender Jakub Wawrzyniak has returned to Legia Warsaw following confirmation that he had taken banned substances in a league match in May.

PAOK, who have Euro 2004 star Thodoris Zagorakis as their president, have had a busy pre-season, setting their sights high and signing Argentinian forward Lucio Filomeno from Asteras, former AEK and Italy Under-21 defender Bruno Cirillo from Reggina, and promising midfielder Vasilios Koutsianikoulis for £1m from Ergotelis.

"I am very lucky to wear the PAOK jersey, it is a great honour for me," said Cirillo of his return to football in Greece. "I will do my best to gain the trust of my coach and fellow players and to justify the club for giving me the opportunity to play for them."

More than 70 players have come and gone at **AEK** in the last four years as the Athens club have tried to end a drought of 15 years without a league title. This time around, despite a small budget due to ongoing financial problems, they have managed to land international midfielder Grigoris Makos from Panionios, defender Nikos Karabelas on a free transfer from Aris and Romanian midfielder Ilie Iordache from Pandurii.

Return...ex-AEK man Cirillo has joined PAOK

Last season's surprise package **Larisa** have not added any major new signings so far, while **Aris** have picked up Argentinian defender Cristian Nasuti from Banfield, Tunisia midfielder Medhi Nafti from Birmingham City, midfielder Leandro Gracian on loan from Boca Juniors and Uruguayan striker Sebastian Abreu, who ended last season at Real Sociedad in Spain on loan from River Plate of Argentina.

"I had a number of offers from abroad and from Greece, but I chose Aris because it is a club that showed that it wanted me very much," explained Abreu, who has scored 27 goals in 46 appearances for his country. "For my part I will do everything to justify their selection of me and will bring joy to the supporters of the team."

Aris also picked up promising 19-year-old striker Ian Daly, who has played for Manchester City's junior teams and has been a member of the Republic of Ireland Under-17 and Under-19 squads.

Slovakia forward Peter Styvar, on loan from Bristol City, is the big summer signing so far for **Xanthi**, while **Panionios** picked up Croatian forward Bosko Balaban on a free transfer from Dinamo Zagreb and Argentinian midfielder Carlos Casteglione on loan from Arsenal Sarandi.

Of last season's strugglers only **Iraklis**, who will be coached by Ukrainian Oleg Protasov this season, have added significantly to their squad, signing Sweden midfielder Sharbel Touma from Borussia Monchengladbach and Romanian striker Victoras Iacob from Otopeni. **Ergotelis**, **Panthrakikos**, **Asteras** and **Levadiakos** have so far failed to add any players that might help them move up the table this term.

The newly promoted trio of **Atromitos**, **Giannina** and **Kavala** are also low on incoming help, though second division champions Atromitos did sign Poland midfielder Marcin Baszczynski from Wisla Krakow.

"This is the first time in my career that I will be playing for a club outside Poland, but I have played in many European contests and have gained much experience," said the 31-year-old, who won six Polish league championships.

"I feel great that I will be continuing my career in Greece."

Lou Economopoulos

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/greece

HOLLAND EREDIVISIE 2009-10

KEY DATES

Season starts **July 31, 2009**
Season ends **May 2, 2010**

PREDICTING who will win this season's Dutch title requires more guesswork than ever as the gap between the traditional big three (Ajax, Feyenoord, PSV) and the new teams on the block closes faster than ever.

There is also a crucial external factor that makes such predictions even more difficult: with wealthy Spanish and English clubs making a habit of signing Eredivisie players in the final days of the transfer window, Dutch teams have virtually no chance of hiring decent replacements.

Champions **AZ** have lost mentor Louis Van Gaal to Bayern Munich and it is left to new coach Ronald Koeman to repeat last year's success. Influential chairman Dirk Scheringa will probably focus on their first Champions League appearance, and in Koeman – admired for his international experience – he has hopefully signed the right man.

However, the big question will be whether the European games impact on their domestic campaign. So far the Alkmaar club have kept their squad together, but Moussa Dembele and Mounir El Hamdaoui are hot properties and could still be snapped up.

Twente coach Steve McClaren would like to go one better than last season when his side finished league runners-up and lost in the Dutch Cup Final. However, he has suffered serious blows with winger Eljero Elia moving to Hamburg and defender Edson Braafheid signing for Bayern, while injured striker Marko Arnautovic is likely to join Internazionale during the winter break. In come left-back Nicky Kuiper from Vitesse, Chelsea's Slovakian winger Miroslav Stoch, Iraq midfielder Nashat Akram and South Africa forward Bernard Parker, who scored both goals in the 2-0 win over New Zealand at the Confederations Cup. They have also signed Costa Rica striker Bryan Ruiz, for a reported club record fee of £4.3million, from Belgian side Gent.

Getting involved...Koeman at AZ training

Amsterdam adventure...Jol has the sizeable task of restoring Ajax's fortunes

In Ronald Koeman – admired for his international experience – champions AZ have probably signed the right man

Martin Jol has the massive task of leading **Ajax** to their first title in six years. Many think he can do it, but much will depend on how he copes with a powerful board. "Jol is in charge – but has he got the power?" Johan Cruyff asked recently.

Jol is looking for experience to supplement his young squad but a number of central defenders (Braafheid, USA's Oguchi Onyewu) and strikers (Elia, Marcus Berg) opted against a move to Amsterdam. He eventually signed Cameroon defender Timothee Atouba from his previous club, Hamburg. Ajax have also lost Belgium defender Thomas Vermaelen to Arsenal, but Holland keeper Maarten Stekelenburg has decided to stay after being dumped by former coach Marco Van Basten last year.

PSV will probably restore order and be a title contender again after last season's fiasco under Huub Stevens. Former Guus Hiddink assistant Fred Rutten has taken over and the club's South American contingent will feel much more comfortable under him than the disciplinarian Stevens. New signings Andre Ooijer (Blackburn) and Orlando Engelaar (Schalke) will play key roles.

Money is tight at **Feyenoord** and it's down to coach Mario Been and advisor Leo Beenhakker to pull off some quality signings. External financiers have paid for the signing of Dani Fernandez (on loan at NEC last season), Aleksandar Ignjatovic (on loan from Serbia's Borac Cacak) and Sekou Cisse (Roda JC), but may not be enough to clinch a European spot.

Cup winners **Heerenveen** will target another European place but have lost their best player, Danijel Pranjic, to Bayern Munich and only a couple of little-known foreigners, including former Arsenal trainee Michal Papadopulos, have arrived. But as the signings of Ruud Van Nistelrooy, Klaas-Jan Huntelaar and Jon Dahl Tomasson proved in the past, the Frisian club have a good scouting network.

Groningen will have the same goal in mind and Ron Jans, the longest-serving coach in the Eredivisie, is more than capable. However, they need to replace Marcus Berg, who has joined Hamburg (see Six of the Best, page 64).

Dark horses **NAC Breda** surprisingly took the last European place in last season's play-offs. Promising coach Robert Maaskant has managed to keep his squad together and might pull off another stunt.

Utrecht and **Vitesse** have a history of internal chaos while life without Been will be hard for **NEC Nijmegen**, although they hope they have signed the "new Dirk Kuyt" in Belgian lookalike, striker Bjorn Vleminckx from Mechelen.

Willem II should be too good for the relegation zone but **Den Haag**, **Sparta**, **Roda JC** and **Heracles** could all end up in trouble. The first two have goalkeeping problems, while Roda, on the brink of bankruptcy, have low expectations after a narrow escape in the relegation play-offs.

Put your shirt on me...PSV new boy Engelaar

Heracles ditched coach Gert Heerkens in favour of Gertjan Verbeek, who will try to show in his second spell in Almelo his disciplinary methods are more suitable there than at Feyenoord. He will have to do it, however, without top scorer Ricky Van den Bergh, now at Den Haag.

Promoted **VVV-Venlo** and **RKC Waalwijk** have a realistic chance of staying up. Despite having the lowest budgets in the league, both have a number of players with Eredivisie experience. With Japan midfielder Keisuke Honda staying at Venlo and Ajax reserve goalkeeper Dennis Gentenaar arriving, VVV could finish higher than Limburg rivals Roda.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/holland

PORTUGAL LIGA 2009-10

KEY DATES

Season starts August 16, 2009
Season ends May 9, 2010

HISTORY beckons for **Porto** this season as they aim to equal their own record of winning five straight titles, having first achieved the feat back in 1999.

Whether the northern heavyweights are successful will largely depend on who leaves the club before the transfer window closes. So far, they have lost top scorer Lisandro Lopez and versatile left-back Aly Cissokho to Lyon, while influential midfielder Lucho Gonzalez has joined Marseille. To soften the blow, Argentinian playmaker Fernando Belluschi from Olympiakos and Colombian striker Radamel Falcao (River Plate) have been brought in. The pressure will be on coach Jesualdo Ferreira to make those new pieces fit in his puzzle and keep the championship streak going.

There is no Portuguese club more familiar with losing top talent to overseas clubs than **Sporting Lisbon**. The Lions have seen the likes of Simao Sabrosa, Hugo Viana, Ricardo Quaresma and Cristiano Ronaldo all leave the Alvalade stadium before reaching their peak, but there seems to have been a change in fortune over the last couple of years.

Striking addition...Falcao has joined Porto

Wanted midfielders Joao Moutinho and Miguel Veloso have stuck around and it seems they will again line up in the green and white hoops this season. That's great news for manager Paulo Bento, who hasn't had much money to play with in the transfer market. The lone signing so far has been Chile international Matias Fernandez, who arrived from Villarreal.

Sporting have finished runners-up in the last four years and will be hoping to finally take an extra step this season and win their first title since 2002.

Lisbon rivals **Benfica** have championship hopes of their own. Expectations, always sky high at the Estadio da Luz, have not been realised of late and just one title in the last 15 years is the poorest spell in the club's history. Their failure has resulted in a yearly change of manager and this season was no exception, with Jorge Jesus joining from Sporting Braga. Jesus, who also had successful spells with Uniao Leiria and Belenenses, is getting his big break and a first real chance at winning silverware.

He will have a strong squad at his disposal with president Luis Filipe Vieira investing in Argentina striker Javier Saviola (Real Madrid) and Brazil's Ramires (Cruzeiro). The two players join a large South American contingent at the club with Luisao, Pablo Aimar, Angel Di Maria and Oscar Cardozo the most notable. Jesus has professed his desire to play with two up front, which will be music to the ears of Benfica fans. Saviola and Cardozo are expected to get the nod ahead of Nuno Gomes and Mantorras.

Only one club outside the traditional big three has won the title in the last 50 years and few expect any of the other teams to be contenders.

Nacional of Madeira finished fourth last season, equalling their best-ever performance, but will struggle to repeat it considering they lost Nene, the league's top striker, to Cagliari and central defender Maicon to Porto. Manuel Machado is an experienced and wily coach, but another top-five finish may be too much to ask.

That's good news for **Sporting Braga** who were fifth and are aiming to re-establish their position as Portugal's fourth-best club. Having lost their inspirational manager to Benfica, they have brought in Domingos Paciencia, who led Academica to an impressive seventh place last season.

Having qualified for Europe for only the second time in their history – as last season's Portuguese Cup runners-up to Porto, **Pacos Ferreira** aren't seen as contenders for a Europa League spot again this time, with many observers expecting the resurgence of **Guimaraes**, who finished third in 2008 but dropped to eighth a year later. New manager Nelo Vingada starts his fourth season at the club with high expectations. Former Portuguese international Alex returns to the club following a spell at Wolfsburg and has been followed by USA's Kamani Hill.

Having led the table before running out of steam and finishing sixth last term, **Leixoes** will probably join **Academica** and **Maritimo** in mid-table tranquillity while the other top-flight clubs face a battle against relegation.

Rio Ave, **Naval** and **Setubal** all managed to survive last year but should expect another rough ride this time around and could even be weaker than both newcomers, **Uniao Leiria** and **Olhanense**. Leiria are back in the first division, where they had been a mainstay over the last decade, while Olhanense have a good manager in former Porto defender Jorge Costa and have strengthened their side considerably.

One final word about **Belenenses**. Lisbon's third most popular club were relegated at the end of last year but readmitted to the top flight following the financial collapse of Estrela Amadora, who struggled to pay players' salaries last season and failed to provide the league with the necessary financial assurances to be entered in the championship. As a result, they have been relegated to the third division.

Exciting challenge...Jorge Jesus

Pedro Pinto

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/portugal

Benfica's new coach Jorge Jesus is getting his big break and a first chance for silverware

Life with the Lions...Sporting Lisbon have hung on to Miguel Veloso and Joao Moutinho

ROMANIA LIGA 1 2009-10

KEY DATES

Season starts August 1, 2009
Winter break December 13, 2009 to February 14, 2010
Season ends May 30, 2010

ALTHOUGH seven Romanian teams are competing in Europe this season, the country's club sides remain one of European football's poor relations.

Financial problems, the endless changing of coaches, corruption trials involving federation officials and players' agents, dubious transfers abroad, refereeing scandals and supporter violence have all affected the game.

Yet despite all of this, Dan Petrescu, coach of defending champions **Unirea Urziceni**, remains hugely upbeat about the coming season. "Unirea have four competitions to win this season: Champions League, Romanian Super Cup, league and cup," says the 41-year-old. "Why did I remember Champions League? There is a grain of lunacy in any mind, so why miss this grain from my players' heads?"

Their closest title challengers last season were **Timisoara**, who are equally ambitious in stating that their aims this season are the domestic league and cup double, plus qualification for the group stage of the Champions League.

To help them in their quest, new coach Ioan Sabau has been recruited from Gloria Bistrita and he has brought Senegalese striker Gueye Mansour back into the first-team squad and signed international defender Alex Bourceanu from Otelul.

Dinamo have also got themselves a new boss, with former Roma, Milan and Juventus defender Dario Bonetti becoming the latest Italian coach to earn a living in the Romanian top flight. He was given the job when Mircea Rednic walked out following Cornel Dinu's appointment as sporting director, but Bonetti faces a tough task trying to rebuild a team that have been deeply affected by their recent lack of success.

Smitten...Unirea Urziceni won their first-ever title last season and coach Petrescu would love more

Despite Romanian football's domestic problems, Dan Petrescu remains hugely upbeat about Unirea Urziceni's chances

Gigi Becali, the owner of rivals **Steaua**, was happy to describe the arrival of his club's new Italian coach, Cristiano Bergodi, as the "transfer of the season". The newcomer wasted no time in shaking up his squad, dropping striker Dayro Moreno, winger Antonio Semedo, and midfielders Mihaita Plesan and Florin Lovin to the reserves, while bringing in Poland's Rafal Grzelak from Greek side Skoda Xanthi and Bulgaria's Krum Bibishkov from Litex Lovech.

CFR Cluj, champions in 2008, also have a new leader in Portuguese coach Toni. He will have to make do without defenders Alvaro Pereira and Andre De Souza Galiassi, who have left for Porto and Kasimpasa of Turkey respectively, while Canada goalkeeper Lars Hirschfeld has signed for German club Energie Cottbus. Playmaker Eugen Trica has returned from Anorthosis of Cyprus.

Failure to qualify for Europe last season means **Rapid** owner George Copos does not have the funds to strengthen the Bucharest club's squad this season, so supporters will just have to be content that their Brazilian duo, midfielder Cesinha and striker Juliano Spadaccio, have been retained.

The departure of coach Razvan Lucescu to take over the national team left **Brasov** without a leader for several weeks until the arrival of Nicolo Napoli lifted spirits. Meanwhile, the signing of striker Valentin Badea was such a boost for **Universitatea Craiova** that new team-mate Florin Soava claimed the club are now good enough to win their first championship for 18 years.

Former FIFA referee Adrian Porumboiu changed his mind about giving up ownership of **Vaslui** after the club's last-minute qualification for the Europa League. However, there were few transfer dealings for young coach Cristian Dulca to enhance his side this summer.

A solid defence may make up for a lack of fresh faces for coach Sorin Cartu at **Pandurii**, while former international Dorinel Munteanu, who replaces Petre Grigoras in charge of **Otelul**, has bought in a dozen new players.

Grigoras is now in charge of **Poli Iasi**, who were rescued from relegation by Bergodi last term before he joined Steaua, and they, along with **Gloria Bistrita**, could struggle again.

Gaz Metan were relegated last season but reprieved when the Romanian Football Federation decided to relegate Arges Pitesti instead after owner Cornel Penescu was found guilty of corruption.

Newly promoted **International** from the city of Curtea de Arges brought eight new players but look destined to return to the second tier.

Astra Ploiesti, a poor club who spent six years in the lower divisions, **Unirea Alba Iulia** and **Ceahlaul Piatra Neamt**, back in the top flight after a one-year exile, will also struggle.

Radu Timofte

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/romania

Busy...Otelul's Munteanu has 12 new players

SCOTLAND PREMIER LEAGUE 2009-10

KEY DATES

Season starts August 15, 2009
Season ends May 8, 2010

REGAINING the SPL title will be the minimum requirement for Tony Mowbray in his first season in charge of **Celtic**, but he will also need to improve on the team's patchy Champions League record. Jan Vennegoor of Hesselink and Paul Hartley have been replaced by a pair of Nancy boys: £3.8million forward Marc-Antoine Fortune (who Mowbray had on loan at West Brom last season) and Cameroon international Landry N'Guemo, who will slot into a midfield that will be without Shunsuke Nakamura this season after he left for Spanish side Espanyol.

Automatic Champions League

Loan Ranger...Aaron

qualification has guaranteed champions **Rangers** a £10m windfall, but manager Walter Smith has refused to rush into the transfer market. The focus so far has been offloading players, with veteran defender Christian Dailly and midfielder Brahim Hemdani among those shown the exit. Smith will certainly want to inject some additional creativity ahead of the European campaign, with a winger and striker likely to top his wish-list. Young Spanish midfielder Aaron, who spent a season on loan from Valencia, has extended his Ibrox stay.

After an impressive first season at **Hearts**, Csaba Laszlo has been beefing up his squad in a big way. In addition to midfielder Ian Black, signed on a free from relegated Inverness, Laszlo has recruited Algerian international defender Ismael Bouzid from Turkish club Ankaragucu, Polish centre-back Dawid Kucharski from Lech Poznan and Spanish winger Suso from Tenerife, while fending off bids for England Under-21 midfielder Andrew Driver. Third place last season means Hearts enter the Europa League in the play-off round.

Big job...Mowbray will be hoping to bring success back to Celtic

Mark McGhee was part of Alex Ferguson's **Aberdeen** side that regularly humbled the Old Firm in the 1980s. Now back at Pittodrie as manager, success will be defined in more modest terms as the Dons do battle with Dundee United and Hearts for third spot. McGhee knows he must do so on a limited budget and he lost out to English third-tier club Norwich City in a bidding war for Motherwell midfielder Steven Hughes.

A leaky defence cost Craig Levein's **Dundee United** third place last season and to compound those problems they have lost excellent Polish keeper Lukasz Zaluska to Celtic, while his Slovakian replacement Dusan Pernis doesn't arrive from Zilina until December. Former Hearts keeper Steve Banks, drafted in as player-coach, will help plug the gap, as will defender Andy Webster, who joins on a season-long loan from Rangers.

Meanwhile, former England Under-18 Jennison Myrie-Williams, who can play in midfield or up front, has arrived from Bristol City.

New **Motherwell** manager Jim Gannon knows he must add experience to a youthful squad whose naivety was exposed during a shock home defeat to Welsh side Llanelli in the Europa League first qualifying round (though they bounced back in the second leg). Some defensive reinforcements will be a priority and Gannon's job will be made tougher by the departure of midfielder Hughes.

Well done...John Sutton scored against Llanelli

With no money to spend at **Kilmarnock**, and having lost several key members of his squad as he looks to pare down the wage bill, manager Jim Jefferies needs to be at his creative best to get his side to overachieve once more and retain their status as a mid-table outfit. He has managed to bring in Middlesbrough winger Graeme Owens, who can be deployed on either flank, though a proven striker remains the priority.

Former player John "Yogi" Hughes will hope to restore consistency at **Hibernian** after a non-descript season under Finnish coach Mixu Paatelainen. Hughes has lost star performer Steven Fletcher to Burnley for £3m, but talented former Arsenal graduate Patrick Cregg has been drafted in from Falkirk. Unlikely to be handed a generous transfer kitty, Hughes will put the emphasis on youth and seven members of Hibs' Under-19 double-winning team of last season have been handed senior contracts.

Gus MacPherson's **St Mirren** only avoided the drop on goal difference and they will need to produce more firepower to avoid another relegation scrap this term. Out goes homesick Argentinian defender Franco Miranda, replaced by Aberdeen's Lee Mair. Experienced goalkeeper Paul Gallacher has been added to help shore up a rearguard that conceded 52 goals last season.

Hamilton defied the pundits by surviving their maiden season last year and the Accies will now fancy their chances of cementing their top-flight status. However, having already lost defender Brian Easton to English Premier League newcomers Burnley, they then saw highly rated teenage midfielder James McCarthy join Wigan Athletic for an initial fee of £1.2m, rising to £3m depending on appearances.

After a seven-year hiatus, **St Johnstone** return to the top flight on a high, following a runaway First Division title triumph. Manager Derek McInnes has recruited former Gretna goal machine Kenny Deuchar, who is a qualified doctor, to provide some tonic up front. Livingston duo Dave Mackay and Murray Davidson have been snared for a combined fee of £50,000 to bolster defence and midfield respectively, while keeper Graeme Smith has arrived from Rangers.

Falkirk have turned to former reserve team coach Eddie May to reshape the squad. May has already conducted a mass clear-out, releasing Steve Lovell, Gerard Aafjes, Kevin McBride, Mark Staunton and Scott Gibb, while striker Michael Higdon has joined St Mirren and defender Dean Holden has moved to Shrewsbury Town. Coming in on loan are Burnley's Scotland Under-19 captain Alex MacDonald and Liverpool winger Ryan Flynn, who left the Bairns for Anfield for £75,000 in 2005.

Dan Brennan

Rangers manager Walter Smith will want to inject some additional creativity ahead of his side's European campaign

SERBIA SUPER LIGA 2009-10

KEY DATES

Season starts August 8, 2009
Season ends May 2010

SURPRISES are part of football, but it would be a sensation if anybody other than **Partizan** were to win the title this season, with the top flight increased from 12 to 16 clubs.

The champions have so far managed to hold on to Senegalese striker Lamine Diarra, though he could still leave before the end of the transfer window. Brazilian attacker Cleo, signed from arch-rivals Red Star (who could no longer afford him), arrived as a potential replacement, while they also signed experienced defender Mladen Krstajic, who returned to his old club after nine years in Germany with Werder Bremen and Schalke.

Tough times ahead...Petrovic

Although right-back Ivan Stevanovic has moved to Sochaux, Brazilian holding midfielder Juca has signed for Deportivo La Coruna and Serbia left-back Ivan Obradovic is also set to leave, Partizan should still be strong enough to dominate.

Perennial rivals **Red Star**, just like last season, simply don't look good enough to be serious candidates. The country's most successful club – with 25 league titles, 22 cups, and European Cup and World Club Cup winners in 1991 – Red Star are in financial difficulty and will rely mostly on players from their youth system and several low-profile newcomers.

Vojvodina could be the dark horses of the championship race following the return of president and main backer Ratko Butorovic

New chairman Vladan Lukic is their fourth since 2005 and the new head coach is Vladimir Petrovic, who led them successfully in 1996 and later guided Serbia & Montenegro's Under-21 side to the 2004 European Championship Final before working in China and Kuwait.

"A long, hard road is in front of us," says Lukic. "We need time and patience. That's all I ask from the fans." Reading between the lines, his comments suggest another gloomy season awaits.

Vojvodina, guided by new coach Dragoslav Stepanovic, have big ambitions and could be the dark horses of the championship race. After the return of president and main financial backer Ratko Butorovic, the Novi Sad club have signed Romanian playmaker Alin Stoica from Brasov and Brazilian defender Marcelo Pletsch (formerly with Monchengladbach and Kaiserslautern) from Omonia in Cyprus. It is also expected 18-year-old striker Danijel Aleksic will get more playing time and prove his great potential.

Great potential...Aleksic

As for other clubs, some will fancy their chances of securing a Europa League spot, but most will be happy to stay up.

OFK have been the fourth force in the past few seasons, but are now in sharp decline and last season saved themselves from relegation on the last day. The loss this summer of their two best players – Aleksandar Ignjovski to Munich 1860 and Aleksandar Jevtic to Red Star – will have done little to help their cause.

Smederevo and **Javor** are likely relegation candidates, along with newcomers **BSK** (a small club from the outskirts of Belgrade, who play their home games at OFK's stadium), **Mladi Radnik** from Pozarevac, **Spartak Zlatibor** and **Metalac**.

Jagodina, **Rad**, **Hajduk**, **Cukaricki**, **Borac** and **Napredak** should be comfortable in mid-table.

Vladimir Novak

Guessing game...champions Partizan face a battle to keep Senegalese striker Diarra (centre)

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/serbia

SWITZERLAND SUPER LEAGUE 2009-10

Finishing power...Young Boys will hope for more of the same from Ivorian Seydou Doumbia, last season's league top scorer

KEY DATES

Season starts July 11, 2009
Season ends May 2010

REIGNING champions and title winners in three of the past four seasons, **Zurich** are favourites to dominate once again.

Continuity is FCZ's trump card, with jovial but demanding French-speaking coach Bernard Challandes making relatively few changes to a squad that will hope to carry on from where they left off last term.

Only two new faces of note have come in – national team attacking midfielder Johan Vonlanthen on a season-long loan from Salzburg and Lucerne's Serb midfielder Milan Gajic – while departures have been kept to a minimum. Playmaker Almen Abdi is said to be on the shopping list of Serie A's Udinese, but even if he does go the club need look no further than Tunisian Yassine Chikhaoui, fit again after a long spell out with a knee problem.

Conversely, it's been all change at St Jakob-Park after **Basle** finished a disappointing third last term. With the authority of coach Christian Gross plainly on the wane after a decade in charge, president Gigi Oeri decided the time was right to sack the most successful boss in the club's history and hand the reins to former Bayern Munich midfielder and Salzburg assistant coach Thorsten Fink.

The new broom has certainly been sweeping clean, notably insisting on a more cultured playing style and dumping first-teamers, such as long-serving Serb midfielder Ivan Ergic, from the squad.

The biggest change has seen the return of the national side's record goalscorer Alexander Frei from Borussia Dortmund to replace Eren Derdiyok, who has moved to Bayer Leverkusen. The 30-year-old Frei is joined by Brazilian midfielder Antonio Da Silva on loan from Karlsruhe, Turkey central defender Cagdas Atan (Energie Cottbus) and young Ghanian right-back Samuel Inkoom (Asante Kotoko).

The club also have high hopes for a crop of talented youngsters such as 17-year-old Swiss-Kosovan midfielder Xherdan Shaqiri.

Many believe that **Young Boys**, runners-up in the past two seasons, have haemorrhaged too much talent to remain contenders after popular striker Thomas Haberli opted to retire and key midfielders Carlos Varela and Christian Schwegler moved on to Neuchatel Xamax and Salzburg respectively.

However the sceptics forget the team-building and strategic wiles of coach Vladimir Petkovic and the ability still at the Berne club. Captain and midfielder Mario Raimondi is a sure source of goals and assists, while they also boast the league's top scorer last term in Ivorian striker Seydou Doumbia.

Basle's new broom, Thorsten Fink, has certainly been sweeping clean, dumping a host of first-teamers from the squad

Grasshopper opted to go down the old boy route when searching for a successor to Hanspeter Latour as head coach and plumped for former star Ciriaco Sforza. He can be relied upon to fire up his new charges but, all in all, the quality is spread too thinly to mount an enduring championship challenge. They will especially miss Argentinian striker Raul Bobadilla who is now with Borussia Monchengladbach.

In charge at Grasshopper...old boy Sforza

As residents of the top flight since 1981, **Aarau** are not known as "the team they cannot relegate" for nothing. Polish coach Ryszard Komornicki may have given way in the dugout to Jeff Saibene, but the recipe for survival will be the same: limitless spirit, good organisation, naked aggression in the tackle and the ability to make the most of the goalscoring chances which come their way. Captain and deep-lying forward Sandro Burki is their talisman.

The pride of the Italian-speaking Ticino region, **Bellinzona** have one aim – and that is to stay out of trouble. Compact, hard-working and sharp on the break, they will rely heavily on the goalscoring instincts of Mauro Lustrinelli, Gurkan Sermeter and Under-21 star Alessandro Ciarrocchi.

Pierre-Andre Schurmann, who recently took over as **Neuchatel Xamax** coach from former national skipper Alain Geiger, might find it hard to keep the wolf from the door over the next 10 months. Reasons to believe, however, can be found in crafty midfielder Varela and Nigerian striker Ideye Aide Brown.

It is wise to always expect the unexpected from Cup holders **Sion**, not exactly known for consistency and who could finish anywhere between fourth and ninth. A good sign is the impressive man-management of French coach Didier Tholot, much less encouraging the sale of compatriot Olivier Monterrubio, who takes his lively front running to Lorient in Ligue 1.

Lucerne only stayed up by beating Lugano in the play-offs, but Rolf Fringer's side ought not to be fighting the drop this season. They demonstrated their ambition by signing Switzerland playmaker Hakan Yakin from Al Gharafa of Qatar.

Promoted **St Gallen** will look to trade for as long as they can on the element of surprise. Coach Uli Forte has them well drilled and they have picked up useful reinforcements in Liechtenstein striker Mario Frick from Siena and Aarau midfielder Kristian Nushi.

Nick Bidwell

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures switzerland

TURKEY SUPER LIG 2009-10

KEY DATES

Season starts August 9, 2009
Season ends May 16, 2010

CHAMPIONS **Besiktas** have spent heavily this summer in pursuit of a repeat of last season's success, bringing back national team striker Nihat Kahveci from Villarreal of Spain and signing former Italy centre-half Matteo Ferrari from Genoa.

Meanwhile, Eintracht Frankfurt midfielder Michael Fink becomes the second German at the club, joining Fabian Ernst who arrived from Schalke in January. Local youngsters Ismael Koybasi from Gaziantepspor and Under-19 right-back Ridvan Simsek of Karsiyaka could also feature as coach Mustafa Denizli bids to make an impact in the Champions League.

Once again, **Fenerbahce** have also dug deep. Aziz Yildirim, who was re-elected for another four years as president, sacked coach Luis Aragones and brought back Christoph Daum. He has picked up Brazilian defender Fabio Bilica from Sivasspor, Turkey midfielder Mehmet Topuz from Kayserispor and the talented Ozer Hurmaci from Ankaraspor, but Yildirim still wants at least one famous name.

Galatasaray already have their big-name signing: coach Frank Rijkaard, with Johan Neeskens as his assistant. Mustafa Sarp from Bursaspor and Besiktas' out-of-contract captain Gokhan Zan were the Turkish signings, while the foreign names joining include Argentina goalkeeper Leo Franco of Atletico Madrid and Ivory Coast winger Kader Keita from Lyon. Sporting director Haldun Ustunel has promised more signings; if and when they arrive, Galatasaray are sure to challenge their Istanbul rivals Besiktas and Fenerbahce for the title.

Signature move...president Aziz Yildirim looks on as Christoph Daum signs on for a second spell in charge at Fenerbahce

Galatasaray already have their big-name signing: coach Frank Rijkaard, with Johan Neeskens as his assistant

Sivasspor surprised everybody with their fighting spirit last season as they qualified for the Champions League preliminary round. But with their best player Bilica sold to Fenerbahce, coach Bulent Uygun says they are starting from scratch. They signed Piter Mbemba from FC Eindhoven, Akeem Agbetu from relegated Kocaelispor and Razak Omotoyossi from Saudi club Al Nassr, but they will need more quality to reach the group stages of the Champions League. A repeat of last season will be difficult with the current squad.

Trabzonspor will start the new season with another new boss: Belgian coach Hugo Broos. The Black Sea side's important signings are Zafer Yelen from Hansa Rostock and Namibian defender Razundara Tjiukuzu from Istanbul BB.

Bursaspor have stuck with coach Ertugrul Saglam and are looking at a Europa League place with a team reliant on youth. **Ankaraspor** coach Jurgen Rober has targeted a top-five finish, while another Ankara team, **Genclerbirligi,** have hired young German coach Thomas Doll in a bid to finally break into the top six. Experienced goalkeeper Serdar Kulbilge has arrived from Kocaelispor.

Ankaragucu are the best-supported team in the capital and have signed former England striker Darius Vassell from Manchester City.

Kayserispor just missed out on a European spot last season, but they might make it this time if coach Tolunay Kafkas spends the £6million the club received from the sale of Topuz to Fenerbahce on new recruits.

Gaziantepspor have a new coach, Jose Coucerio, and have so far held on to key Brazilian midfielder Rodrigo Tabata, but they need more strength to break out of mid-table.

Denizlispor will need a repeat of last season's miracle to avoid relegation. New coach Erhan Altin will be expecting a lot of key signing Ahmet Cebe from Fortuna Dusseldorf.

Antalyaspor also avoided the drop despite their players not being paid for months. Experienced signings Pini Balili (Sivasspor), Kerim Zengin (Istanbul BB) and striker Veysel Cihan (Konyaspor) should improve things this season.

Eskisehirspor have spent heavily in a bid to avoid last season's relegation scrap. National team striker Umit Karan has arrived from Galatasaray and young Batuhan Karadeniz will spend another year on loan from Besiktas.

Istanbul BB, the team owned by the Istanbul municipality, will be confident of a mid-table finish after signing Taner Gulleri (Kocaelispor), Herve Tum (Sivasspor) and Can Arat (Fenerbahce).

Of the promoted teams, **Manisaspor**, based in Izmir, are back after a one-year absence. Coach Mesut Bakkal, one-time assistant to former national coach Ersun Yanal, has promised a positive, attacking style.

Diyarbakirspor have limited finances and their only signing so far has been Adriano from Istanbul BB, but coach Nurullah Saglam did well with Gaziantepspor in the past.

Istanbul's **Kasimpasa,** one of Turkey's oldest clubs, were promoted via the play-offs. Some big signings – Christian Keller (Stabaek), Martin Baran (Tatran Presov of Slovakia) Martin Hudec (Sigma Olomouc), Petr Bolek (Slovan Liberec) and Andre Galiassi (CFR Cluj) – offer proof of their ambition.

Mehmet Demircan

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/turkey

Thumbs up...Gala new boy Kader Keita

BULGARIA APFG 2009-10

KEY DATES

Season starts **August 8, 2009**
Season ends **May 30, 2010**

FOLLOWING their dramatic victory last term, when they clinched the title by a single point, **Levski** are looking to defend their crown with a number of the players who took part in their successful 2006 campaign, when they reached the quarter-finals of the UEFA Cup after becoming the first Bulgarian team to make the Champions League group stage.

Left-winger Hristo Yovov returned from Cyprus in March and central defender Elin Topuzakov came back from Israel in June, while French midfielder Cedric Bardon is also back in the fold after playing in both of those countries. However, coach Emil Velev failed in his attempt to recruit national team striker Dimitar Makriev from Ashdod of Israel as a replacement for injured Georgi Ivanov.

There has also been much speculation about owner Todor Batkov selling his shares to former executive director Nasko Sirakov, though both parties deny such rumours. Sirakov says: "I haven't any intention to return to Levski, but I don't agree with the current team selection."

Arch-rivals **CSKA** have been extremely busy during the close season, even signing seven players in one day. Among the better-known recruits are Ivan Stoyanov (nephew of former Bulgaria star Yordan Lechkov) and Kosta Yanev from Sliven, Spas Delev (Pirin), Orlin Orlinov (Slavia) and former CSKA midfielder Svetoslav Petrov from Azerbaijan's Neftchi.

CSKA coach Luboslav Penev, who says he wants to build a team of mostly Bulgarians, has also threatened to pull on his boots again at the age of 42 – which may interest one of the club's new owners, Dimitar Borissov, who has said the playing budget will be reduced by 40 per cent this season.

Cherno More were one of the big surprises last season, finishing third and running Stuttgart very close in the UEFA Cup. Coach Nikola Spasov will have been delighted that his star turn Alex rejected the opportunity to return to his former club Levski because he feels so at home in the city of Varna.

In recent years, **Lovech** have begun the season with great ambition only to fall away, but coach Stanimir Stoilov, who also heads the national team, hopes to change all that this term with the signing of Svetoslav Todorov (who has returned home after more than eight seasons in English football), former CSKA midfielder Hristo Yanev from Grenoble in France and Serbian midfielder Nebojsa Jelenkovic from Spartak Trnava in Slovakia. Forward Krum Bibishkov has moved to Romanian club Steaua Bucharest.

Capital teams **Lokomotiv** and **Slavia** should also be challenging for the European positions. Loko's Serbian coach Dragan Okuka will again rely heavily on the goals of Martin Kamburov, while Slavia have put their faith in new coach Velislav Vutsov, who was sacked by Levski last season after they lost at home to BATE of Belarus in the third preliminary round of the Champions League.

The rest of the teams in the top flight have different agendas.

With his former Stuttgart team-mate Fredi Bobic as managing director, ex-national star Krassimir Balakov has enormous ambitions with **Chernomorets** from the city of Burgas.

City rivals **Lokomotiv Plovdiv** and **Botev** have contrasting situations. While Lokomotiv's female owner Galya Topalova is financially secure, Botev's owner Dimitar Hristolov infamously didn't pay his players for at least two months, causing many to seek transfers.

For **Pirin**, **Minyor**, **Sliven** and **Lokomotiv Mezdra**, retaining top-flight status is about the limit of their ambitions. But what of the newcomers?

Beroe, champions in 1986 and who were unjustly relegated last year because of administrative decisions, return under former Levski midfielder Ilian Iliev, who will look to the experienced Kostadin Vidolov, Ivaylo Pargov and Zahari Dimitrov.

Back at Levski...Yovov

Ex-Slavia coach Stevica Kuzmanovski is in charge at **Montana**, who have been in the top flight three times before, while **Sportist** from the small city of Svoge are there for the first time in their 85-year history. They are coached by former CSKA defender Aleksandar Aleksandrov and eight of the team are CSKA youth graduates.

Rumen Paytashev

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/bulgaria

GEORGIA UMAGLESI LIGA 2009-10

KEY DATES

Season starts **August 1, 2009**
Season ends **May 22, 2010**

AFTER years of experimenting with the number of clubs in the top flight, the Professional Football League of Georgia has returned to the 10-team format which was last used in the 2004-05 season.

PFLG president Dmitry Ramishvili hopes that having less clubs will increase competitiveness and quality, and says: "We believe that the gradual reducing of the number of clubs from 16 in 2006 to the current 10 will help us to avoid a repeat of the sort of results seen on the final day of the last campaign, when Dinamo Tbilisi tore Borjomi apart 12-0."

Dinamo coach Kakhaber Kacharava, who replaced Reiner Zobel at the end of last season, will be hoping to build on last term's Georgian Cup victory. They start as clear favourites to collect a 14th league title with a squad boasting quality foreign imports such as Argentinian defender Marcos Charras, Slovak midfielder Milos Krsko and Gabonese striker Georges Akieremy. Their only significant departure was Gabon goalkeeper Didier Ovono, who joined French club Le Mans for £600,000.

With no foreigners in their squad, reigning champions **WIT** will continue to rely heavily on graduates from their youth system, with key figures Luka Razmadze, Giorgi Beriashvili and Irakli Klimiashvili all playing their part.

Zestaponi new boy...Eliava

Olimpi began their season earlier than most in the first qualifying round of the Europa League, and their 31-year-old forward Giorgi Megreladze believes they have what it takes to still be in contention by the end. He says: "We are going to put up a strong challenge to WIT and Dinamo in the title race. We have an experienced and balanced squad capable of making a serious impact this season."

Also in early Europa League action were **Zestaponi**, whose striker Jaba Dvali scored the new competition's first hat-trick in a comprehensive win against Lisburn of Northern Ireland. Dvali's exploits were all the more impressive because he was making his debut after arriving from Moldova's Dacia Chisinau.

Zestaponi were the most active club in the transfer market during the summer and also signed Georgia Under-21 goalkeeper Kakhaber Meshveliani from Kolkhida Kutaisi, defender Zaal Eliava from Latvian side Skonto Riga and midfielder Tornike Aptsiauri from Qabala of Azerbaijan. But the most significant signing was 25-year-old defender Giorgi Oniani, who was recruited from Olimpi. With these signings Zestaponi will be strong contenders to win their first title.

Sioni from Bolnisi, one of Georgia's oldest clubs, won the league four years ago but do not look like scaling the same heights again. The crucial figures in their side are all Cameroonian: defender Fridolin Boyomo, midfielder Gaston Evotche and forward Eric Chasem.

Lokomotivi tend to shine in the Georgian Cup and will be expected to finish in mid-table, while **Mglebi** have finished seventh for the past two seasons and will be happy to do the same again.

Meskheti are set for a survival fight along with the two newcomers, **Ameri Tbilisi** and **Samtredia**.

Oleg Zadernovsky

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/georgia

HUNGARY NBI 2009-10

KEY DATES

Season starts **July 25, 2009**
Season ends **May 2010**

WITH record title winners Ferencvaros back in the top flight after three years, the new campaign could spring a few surprises.

Last season's champions **Debrecen** – who claimed their fourth title in five years – have a shrewd transfer policy that is the envy of many. With the window still open, they have so far acquired David Mohl from Fehervar and Adamo Coulibaly from Royal Antwerp. Under Gabor Szima's wise ownership, the experienced coaching of Andras Herczeg and the firepower of top scorer Gergely Rudolf, the provincial outfit should once again be the measure of most teams in Hungary.

As for **Ferencvaros**, Szima himself doesn't rate their chances, claiming: "They're simply not good enough." Despite the rumoured arrival of several English players, only Peter Poloskey and David Kulcsar are definitely confirmed, joining from Szombathely and second-tier Vecses respectively. Coach Bobby Davison will have his work cut out raising his side's game after three years of lower-league football as the expectations – not to mention season-ticket sales – are high.

Their Budapest rivals **Ujpest** are as chaotic as ever. The arrival of coach Willie McStay from Celtic reserves became a charade of missed faxes and training sessions, but the Scot has rolled up his sleeves and made last season's top scorer Peter Kabat his captain and lynchpin. However, UTE must play their first three home games behind closed doors after crowd trouble.

Having made it through the first qualifying round of the Europa League after a tricky tie against Irtysh of Kazakhstan, **Szombathely** have lost key forward Krisztian Kenesei to a wrist injury. Although not yet championship material under able coach Aurel Csertoi, last year's third-placed finishers should surprise a few people.

Local rivals **Zalaegerszeg**, who finished a point behind, have brought in two players from Diosgyor – Bosnian midfielder Djordje Kamber and Serb defender Milan Bogonuvic. Another strong provincial outfit, **Kecskemet**, may improve with the signing of Slovene forward Uros Veselic from Rudar Velenje, while **Kaposvar** will be hoping to build on last season's ninth place.

Still in the provinces, promoted **Lombard-Papa**, who owe their new status to Gyirmot's failure to gain a top-flight licence, have claimed on-loan Togo midfielder Euloge Ahodikpe back from Diosgyor and signed a handful of modest domestic players.

Meanwhile, **Fehervar** brightened the close season with on-off rumours of former national boss Lothar Matthaus coming in as coach, only for wily old Gyorgy Mezey to take the post instead.

Back in Budapest, George Hemingway – owner of **Honved** and head of the league chairmen's body – has been preoccupied with the battle over TV rights and his club have therefore not signed any big names. The on-loan poaching of MTK's Adam Hrepka is the most notable arrival.

MTK themselves seem to be facing more mediocrity judging by the quality of the players signed, while cash-strapped **Vasas** continue to seek new investment while getting rid of their best players.

In the east, **Diosgyor** had looked to be going out of business. Although top-flight status has been maintained, perhaps briefly, the departure of a dozen players doesn't bode well. Local rivals **Nyiregyhaza** benefitted from their plight by picking up lively Japanese forward Honma Kazuo.

Paks have not only managed to keep prolific striker Attila Tokoli, they have teamed him up with midfielder Krisztian Lisztes, another ex-Ferencvaros favourite. **Gyor** have signed players from Slovakia, Georgia, Croatia, Cameroon and Bulgaria and beat modest foreign opposition in pre-season friendlies, but whether the new arrivals can gel in time to lift them from last year's mid-table mediocrity remains to be seen.

In control...Ujpest captain Kabat

Peterjon Cresswell

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/hungary

MACEDONIA PRVA LIGA 2009-10

KEY DATES

Season starts **August 1, 2009**
Season ends **May 19, 2010**

LAST season **Makedonija** won the league for the first time in their 77-year history and coach Ilco Gjorgjioski has been busy strengthening his squad ahead of their defence of that title.

Ex-internationals Igor Kralevski and Ivica Gligorovski have been added, along with Serbian keeper Danilo Pustinjakovic and Brazilian forward Felipe, while Gjorgjioski was also hoping to persuade ex-Rabotnicki forward Ivan Trickovski to join his team from the suburbs of Skopje.

Several draws against relatively weak teams on a pre-season tour of Serbia were not the greatest boost for the club. However, this season's championship hopes could be boosted by the plight of last term's runners-up, **Milano**.

Financial problems have threatened to force the team from Kumanovo to withdraw from the competition, though coach Erkan Jusuf remains hopeful they can retain the club's top-flight status, despite having to start the season with players from the youth team following the departure of top performers such as last season's top league scorer Gligorovski, who has joined Makedonija.

Heading out...Makedonija (stripes) lost to BATE of Belarus in this seasons' Champions League second qualifying round

Milano's problems stem from the arrest for tax evasion earlier this year of owner Bajrus Sejdiu, who is famous in the local media as a tobacco-mafia boss.

Vardar also had their share of problems last season but, despite the departure of ex-president Trifun Kostovski leaving them with no sponsor and no money, famous Macedonian internationals are still prepared to join the club. Gjorgji Hristov, who won 48 caps and has knee problems, will probably still be good enough to help new coach Pane Blazevski's youngsters fight for the title.

Renova, whose season started early with the Europa League qualifiers, have bought Boban Jancevski from Vardar and Fisnik Gasi from Milano, though **Metalurg** were probably the busiest side in the transfer window. New coach Gjore Jovanovski, who has won five Macedonian titles (three with Sloga and two with Rabotnicki), bought in new captain Zoran Jovanoski, international Miroslav Vajs, Brazilians Miranda Rodrigues and Carlos Abrilio Neno, Serbian Djordje Tadic, the keeper Trajce Nikov and Blagojce Rutevski from Pelister, Dimitrija Lazarevski from Dender of Belgium, Jovica Trajcev from Rabotnicki, Mile Krstev from Pobeda, and Blagojce Gesoski from Milano.

Rabotnicki also have a new coach in Zoran Stratev, who replaces Boban Babunski after he resigned to take over the national Under-21 side.

Despite the signing of Saso Lazarevski and Goran Gancev from Milano, **Pelister** could face another relegation battle after the loss of several key players.

Turnovo, **Sileks** and **Pobeda** will also struggle once again as the financial crisis forces them to stick with mostly the same players they had last season.

Promoted **Sloga** and **Teteks** will be looking for nothing more than survival after long absences from Prva Liga.

Michel Stojmanovski

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/macedonia

MALTA PREMIER LEAGUE 2009-10

KEY DATES

Season starts August 21, 2009
Season ends May 5, 2010

REIGNING champions **Hibernians** have already won their first silverware of the new season – picking up the annual Euro Cup, which features the country's four European entrants – but defending their league crown could prove much harder.

Although the Paolites will start as favourites, they have lost one of their key players: international defender and Malta's player of the season last term, Clayton Failla. The 23-year-old, who has joined **Sliema** in a surprise move, says: "I must confess that I was looking for a new challenge. Sliema offered me this challenge and now it is up to me to keep up my standard going.

"I am looking forward to this new challenge in a big way."

Cup holders Sliema also brought in internationals Ryan Fenech on loan from relegated Hamrun and Josef Mifsud from Valletta, while Hibernians signed Malta Under-21 Ryan Camilleri from Pieta Hotspurs and turned the loan signing of Edward Herrera from Melita into a permanent deal.

However, the biggest challenge the champions face this season will probably come from **Valletta** after new coach Ton Caanen, who replaced Paul Zammit, did the deal of the summer to convince 35-year-old former Barcelona and Manchester United star Jordi Cruyff to sign a three-year deal as a player and also to assist the coaching staff.

"My position with Valletta will be quite a structural one. I want to help this club with my experience, in the best possible manner," says Cruyff.

"I will be there for the club always and also for the coach. I will assist him in the best possible way, but obviously he is the boss. He will be on the bench and I will be on the field of play."

Caanen also had words of praise for Valletta, admitting: "I come to Valletta to win the Premier League. When a club like Valletta opts for such an experienced player as Jordi, you should go for only one priority – and that is winning the championship. But not only to win it, to win it with nice attacking football."

Valletta have further strengthened their squad with the signing of giant Dutch striker Geert Den Ouden and Malta Under-21 Steve Borg.

Former Valletta boss Zammit is now in charge at **Birkirkara** and he has signed Sylvano Comvalius from Hamrun in a bid to improve on the Stripes' disappointing form last season.

Floriana also have a new coach in Irishman Roddy Collins, while **Marsaxlokk** retain basically the same squad as last season. Of last season's strugglers, **Qormi** have acquired former Valletta players Massimo Grima and Jonathan Bondin, and **Tarxien** were hoping to retain last season's top scorer Daniel Mariano Bueno.

It is also likely to be a different season for newcomers **Dingli Swallows** and **Vittoriosa Stars** as they try to hang on to their Premier League status.

Domenic Aquilina

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/malta

Main man... Valletta's new player and assistant coach Cruyff

MONTENEGRO FIRST LEAGUE 2009-10

KEY DATES

Season starts August 8, 2009
Season ends May 2010

THREE different clubs have won the league since it first began three years ago – and two of those are strong favourites to triumph again this season.

Reigning champions **Mogren**, from the Adriatic resort of Budva, may be resigned to losing left-back Luka Pejovic, but they have strengthened their attack with the signing of Srdjan Radonjic and Radislav Sekulic.

Radonjic, 28, a former Serbia & Montenegro Under-23, had four years at Partizan Belgrade and has spent the last two seasons in Denmark, Norway and Austria, while former Buducnost striker Sekulic arrived as free agent.

Mogren don't have any stars or big names, but they can boast several players who are either Under-21 internationals or squad members of the national team. Talented coach Dejan Vukicevic is still in charge for the time being, but it seems only a matter of time before he moves on to bigger and better things.

After relinquishing the title last term, **Buducnost** – who are the country's biggest club and were once the home of players such as Dejan Savicevic and Predrag Mijatovic – have undergone a complete overhaul. They start the new season with a new chairman, a new sports director and a new head coach in Mihajlo Ivanovic, who is a former journalist and an experienced coach who has led several clubs in Serbia, including OFK Belgrade, Smederevo and Zemun. The club's most significant signing of the summer was to keep hold of striker Fatos Beciraj, who was wanted by Hajduk Split.

The young **Sutjeska** side, last season's biggest surprise when they finished third, are no longer dark horses but they could still upset the favourites.

Rudar, who signed 11 new players, and **Grbalj** seem strong enough to compete for places at the higher end of the table, but **Zeta**, the 2007 champions, seem caught in no man's land, especially after controversial club boss Radojica Bozovic allegedly pulled out of football. They sold their best players, the Brazilian duo Cadu and Savio, to Red Star Belgrade.

OFK Petrovac and **Lovcen** will probably be in mid-table, while **Kom**, **Decic** and the two promoted teams – **Berane** and **Mornar** – are likely to be battling it out against relegation.

This season, clubs can field up to four foreign players at any one time, and in an attempt to halt declining attendances the FA has introduced so-called "protected hours" in each round. During these hours no TV station is allowed to broadcast matches from foreign leagues.

Vladimir Novak

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/montenegro

NORTHERN IRELAND IFA PREMIERSHIP 2009-10

KEY DATES

Season starts **Aug 8, 2009**
Season ends **May 1, 2010**

FOR a few weeks after last season's victory celebrations it looked as if champions **Glentoran** might lose manager Alan McDonald. However, the former Northern Ireland and QPR captain eventually signed a new two-year contract and he will have much the same squad at his disposal this term.

Goalkeeper Elliot Morris, Colin Nixon, Kyle Neill, captain Paul Leeman and Sean Ward are the key men in defence, while Dean Fitzgerald and Daryl Fordyce will be joined in midfield by new signing Richard Clarke from Newry City. Gary Hamilton, Michael Halliday and Andrew Waterworth will provide the goals up front.

Having finished runners-up last time in what manager David Jeffrey described as "a season of transition", **Linfield** have lost the services of international keeper Alan Mannus but added the firepower of Curtis Allen from Lisburn.

The 21-year-old will spearhead the attack alongside Paul Munster and Michael Carvill, while 40-year-old Glenn Ferguson has gone in the opposite direction after 11 years with the Blues. Supplying the ammunition will be Jamie Mulgrew, Robert Garrett and new recruit Philip Lowry from Institute.

Crusaders won the Irish Cup for the first time in 41 years last term and boss Stephen Baxter will be hoping for big things again from his young side. Talented left-winger Martin Donnelly (20) and striker Jordan Owens (19) have blended well with experienced campaigners such as forward David Rainey (33) to create an exciting team with bags of potential.

Lisburn shocked local football with their decision to replace long-serving manager Paul Kirk with veteran Jimmy Brown, whose greatest success was to lead second-level Carrick Rangers to a shock Irish Cup Final success in 1976.

With several top players leaving, the new man didn't get off to the best of starts when his charges lost 5-1 at home and 6-0 away to Georgian side Zestafoni in the Europa League.

Ambitious **Coleraine** manager David Platt has drafted in defenders Marc Mukendi from Finn Harps and Aaron Canning from second-tier Limavady United. Midfielder Michael Heggarty from Dungannon and striker Rory Patterson of English non-league side Droylsden have also joined.

Hoping to do better in the league this time are last season's beaten Irish Cup finalists **Cliftonville**, while **Institute** must come to terms with the loss of midfielder Lowry to Linfield.

The demanding supporters of **Ballymena** will be hoping for better things if the proposed signing of striker Andy Smith from Portadown goes through. Promising 21-year-old Sean O'Neill takes over in goal.

Like Ballymena, **Newry** had a difficult time last term, but manager Gerry Flynn's hand has been strengthened by the signing of young Polish striker Lukasz Adamczyk from second-tier Loughgall and the retention of former Linfield and Glentoran forward Chris Morgan.

Marty Quinn, who became the third **Glenavon** manager of the season in January, has added Ballymena winger Stuart King and will field the youngest goalkeeper in the league in 20-year-old Andrew Plummer from Ipswich.

Although they finished bottom last season, **Dungannon** were saved from automatic relegation by the financial woes of Bangor. The Swifts then escaped the drop by winning a play-off against Championship runners-up Donegal Celtic. Caretaker manager for the last month of the season Dixie Robinson has been confirmed in the post and is looking to build a team with the emphasis on young talent and experience. Striker Michael Ward has returned from Glentoran but it may be another anxious season.

www.inpho.ie
Guiding Glens...McDonald

Promoted **Portadown** will be looking to make a big impact after an administrative mistake led to their previous relegation.

Manager Ronnie McFall – entering his 24th year in charge at Shamrock Park – has at his disposal a squad capable of challenging the best. Ex-Millwall striker Kevin Braniff is up front, while defender Darren Kelly has been signed from York City, and it will be a major surprise if the Ports fail to push for a top-four place.

Roy Kitson

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/nireland

WALES PREMIER LEAGUE 2009-10

KEY DATES

Season starts **August 14, 2009**
Season ends **April 24, 2010**

DESPITE a Champions League drubbing by Partizan Belgrade, **Rhyl** are confident of another good domestic season as they look to retain their league crown.

Under the shrewd tactical guidance of manager Allan Bickerstaff, the Lilywhites will again be the side to beat and they have added to their squad with midfielder John Leah (TNS) and defender Martyn Naylor (Telford United), while striker Lee Hunt returns from Barrow.

Llanelli need to increase their fan base in what is a rugby union stronghold if they are to compete at the highest level, though shrewd signings striker Craig Moses (Newtown), defender Lee Jarman (Haverfordwest) and midfielders Owain Warlow (Lincoln City) and Chris Venables (Aberystwyth) give new boss Andy Legg plenty of strength in depth.

The New Saints will be top-three material again, though coach Andy Cale was disappointed with their exit from the Europa League at the hands of Fram Reykjavik. Some of his more experienced players have been replaced with midfielder Aeron Edwards (Caersws), young defender Chris Marriott (Wrexham) and winger Craig Jones (Rhyl).

Carmarthen Town, coached by former international Mark Aizlewood, have achieved a top-seven finish for the last five years and that is likely to continue. New faces include defender Craig Hanford (Haverfordwest) and midfielder Jamie Rewbury (Merthyr Tydfil).

Euro reverse...Rhyl's Gareth Owen(left)

Port Talbot Town, one of the most progressive clubs in the league, will also be top-four contenders, as should **Bangor City**, where new boss Neville Powell has brought striker Ashley Stott back from Halifax Town.

At **Haverfordwest County**, Derek Brazil's young squad has plenty of experience, while **Aberystwyth Town** have lost 17-year-old striker Tom Bradshaw to Shrewsbury Town.

Newtown are one of the big clubs in mid-Wales with the best facilities in the area, while Craig Harrison has taken over a very promising set-up at **Airbus**.

Neath are set to become the third WPL club to turn professional and with midfielder Chris Llewellyn joining from Grimsby, and defenders Ian Hillier (Newport County) and Liam Hancock (Carmarthen) providing experience, they could challenge for silverware.

At the end of the season the league will be re-structured into a 12-team top division, in which all the teams must meet a new licensing system.

Under normal circumstances, **Prestatyn Town** would finish in a safe mid-table position but it may be a tough battle to finish in the so-called "Super-12". Similarly, **Porthmadog** could struggle despite new boss Tomi Morgan making a number of new signings. Meanwhile **Welshpool** will find it hard to make Super-12 status on the field and their ground in its current form will prevent them attaining domestic licence criteria.

Caersws, **Cefn Druids** and promoted **Bala Town** will all have their work cut out to achieve a top-12 finish. **Connah's Quay** are likely to join them as one of the six teams to be relegated.

Mel Thomas

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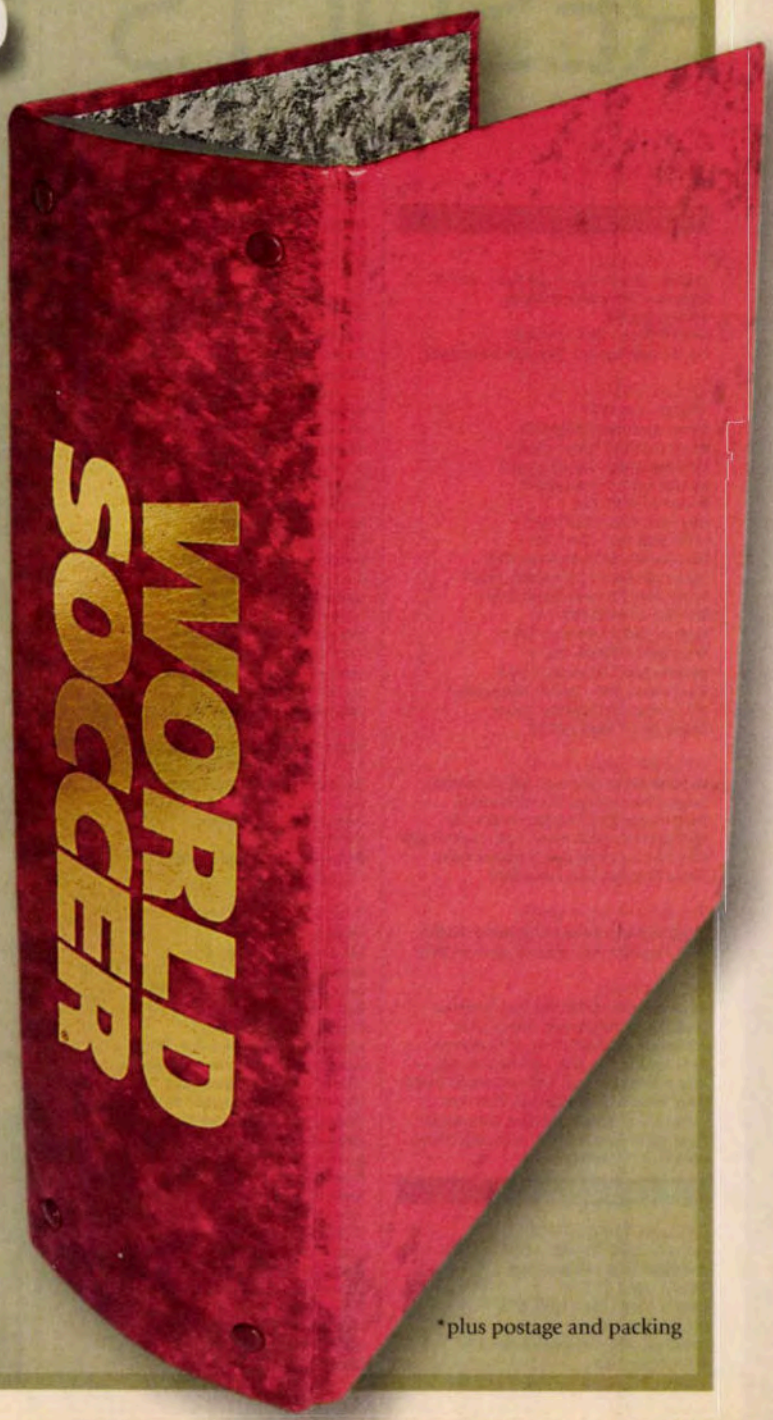

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Reduced ban...Drogba

ENGLAND

Reprieve for Blues

The Champions League suspensions handed down to Chelsea's Didier Drogba and Jose Bosingwa for their actions after last season's semi-final exit at the hands of Barcelona at Stamford Bridge have been reduced to three games and two games respectively on appeal.

Meanwhile, Michael Owen scored on his debut for Manchester United, coming off the bench to get the winner in a 3-2 friendly victory over a Malaysian XI in Kuala Lumpur.

MONTENEGRO

First of the season

Thirty four days after Barcelona beat Manchester United in the Champions League Final in Rome, Marko Cetkovic of Mogren scored the first goal of the 2009-10 competition, putting his side ahead away to Hibernians of Malta. Petar Grbic scored the visitors' second in a 2-0 win.

GEORGIA

History maker

Giorgi Megreladze of Olimpi Rustavi scored the first-ever Europa League goal as he gave his side the lead in a 2-0 win against B36 Torshavn.

Champion start...Cetkovic

RESULTS

EUROPE

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st qualifying round

1st legs - June 30/July 1; 2nd legs - July 7/8

Hibernians (Mlt) v Mogren (Mne)
0-2, 0-4 (agg 0-6)
Tre Fiori (SaM) v Sant Julia (And)
1-1, 1-1 (aet) (agg 2-2; Sant Julia 5-4 on pens)

2nd qualifying round

1st legs - July 14/15

Copenhagen (Den) 6 Mogren 0
Debrecen (Hun) 2 Kalmar (Swe) 0
EB/Streymur (Far) 0 APOEL (Cyp) 2
Ekranas (Lit) 2 FK Baku (Aze) 2
FH (Ice) 0 Aktobe (Kaz) 4
Inter Turku (Fin) 0 Sheriff (Mol) 1
Levski Sofia (Bul) 4 Sant Julia 0
Maccabi Haifa (Isr) 6 Glentoran (NI) 0
Makedonija (Mac) 0 BATE Borisov (Bls) 2
Pyunik (Arm) 0 Dinamo Zagreb (Cro) 0
Rhyl (Wal) 0 Partizan (Ser) 4
Salzburg (Aut) 1 Bohemians (Ire) 1
Tirana (Alb) 1 Stabaek (Nor) 1
Ventspils (Lat) 3 Dudelange (Lux) 0
Wisla Krakow (Pol) 1 Levadia Tallinn (Est) 1
WIT Georgia (Geo) 0 Maribor (Sln) 0
Zrinjski (Bos) 1 Slovan (Slk) 0

3rd qualifying round

Direct entrants: Anderlecht (Blg), Celtic (Sco), Dynamo Moscow (Rus), Olympiakos (Gre), Panathinaikos (Gre), Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr), Sivasspor (Tur), Slavia Prague (Cze), Sparta Prague (Cze), Sporting Lisbon (Por), Timisoara (Rom), Twente Enschede (Hol), Zurich (Swi)

4th qualifying round

Direct entrants: Arsenal (Eng), Atletico Madrid (Spa), Fiorentina (Ita), Lyon (Fra), Stuttgart (Ger)

Group stage

Direct entrants: AZ Alkmaar (Hol), Barcelona (Spa), Bayern Munich (Ger), Besiktas (Tur), Bordeaux (Fra), Chelsea (Eng), CSKA Moscow (Rus), Dynamo Kyiv (Ukr), Internazionale (Ita), Juventus (Ita), Liverpool (Eng), Manchester United (Eng), Marseille (Fra), Milan (Ita), Porto (Por), Rangers (Sco), Real Madrid (Spa), Rubin Kazan (Rus), Sevilla (Spa), Standard Liege (Blg), Unirea Urziceni (Rom), Wolfsburg (Ger)

EUROPA LEAGUE

1st qualifying round

1st legs - July 2; 2nd legs - July 9

Anorthosis (Cyp) v Kaerjeng (Lux)
5-0, 2-1 (agg 7-1)
Banants (Arm) v Siroki Brijeg (Bos)
0-2, 1-0 (agg 1-2)
Buducnost (Mne) v Polonia Warsaw (Pol)
0-2, 1-0 (agg 1-2)
Dinaburg (Lat) v Nomme Kalju (Est)
2-1, 0-0 (agg 2-1)
Dinamo Minsk (Bls) v Renova (Mac)
2-1, 1-1 (agg 3-2)
Fram (Ice) v The New Saints (Wal)
2-1, 2-1 (agg 4-2)
Grevenmacher (Lux) v Vetra (Lit)
0-3, 0-3 (agg 0-6)
Helsingborgs (Swe) v MIKA (Arm)
3-1, 1-1 (agg 4-2)
Lahti (Fin) v Dinamo Tirana (Alb)
4-1, 0-2 (agg 4-3)
Lisburn Distillery (NI) v Zestafoni (Geo)
1-5, 0-6 (agg 1-11)
Motherwell (Sco) v Llanelli (Wal)
0-1, 3-0 (agg 3-1)
NSI (Ice) v Rosenborg (Nor)
0-3, 1-3 (agg 1-6)
Olimpi Rustavi (Geo) v B36 (Far)
2-0, 2-0 (agg 4-0)
Randers (Den) v Linfield (NI)
4-0, 3-0 (agg 7-0)
Simurq (Aze) v Bnei Yehuda (Isr)
0-1, 0-3 (agg 0-4)
Slaven (Cro) v Birkirkara (Mlt)
1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0)
Sligo Rovers (Ire) v Vllaznia (Alb)
1-2, 1-1 (agg 2-3)
Spartak Trnava (Slk) v Inter Baku (Aze)
2-1, 3-1 (agg 5-2)
Sutjeska (Mne) v MTZ-RIPO (Bls)
1-1, 1-2 (aet) (agg 2-3)
Szombathely (Hun) v Irtysh Pavlodar (Kaz)
1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2; Szombathely on away goals)
Trans Narva (Est) v Rudar Velenje (Sln)
0-3, 1-3 (agg 1-6)
Valletta (Mlt) v Keflavik (Ice)
3-0, 2-2 (agg 5-2)
Zimbru (Mol) v Okzheptes (Kaz)
1-2, 2-0 (agg 3-2)

2nd qualifying round

1st legs - July 14/16

AaB (Den) 0 Slavija (Bos) 0
Anorthosis 2 Petrovac (Mne) 1
Basle (Swi) 3 Santa Coloma (And) 0
Bnei Yehuda 4 Dinaburg 0
Brondby (Den) 0 Flora (Est) 1
Cherno More (Bul) 1 Iskra-Stal (Mol) 0
Crusaders (NI) 1 Rabotnicki (Mac) 1
Differdange (Lux) 1 Rijeka (Cro) 0
Dinamo Minsk 0 Tromso (Nor) 0
Elfsborg (Swe) 3 Szombathely 0
Falkirk (Sco) 1 Vaduz (Lie) 0
Flamurtari (Alb) 1 Motherwell 0
Gorica (Sln) 1 Lahti 0
Honka (Fin) 2 Bangor (Wal) 0
Juvenes/Dogana (SaM) 0 Polonia Warsaw 1
KR (Ice) 2 Larisa (Gre) 0
Legia Warsaw (Pol) 3 Olimpi Rustavi 0
Metalurgs (Lat) 2 Dinamo Tbilisi (Geo) 1
Metalurh Donetsk (Ukr) 3 MTZ-RIPO 0
Milano (Mac) 0 Slaven 4
NAC Breda (Hol) 6 Gandzasar (Arm) 0
Naftan (Bls) 2 Gent (Blg) 1
Omonia (Cyp) 4 HB (Far) 0

Up above...Basle's Marco Streller gets the better of the Santa Coloma defence in the Europa League second qualifying round

DENMARK

Player in coma

Nordsjaelland midfielder Jonathan Richter is in a coma after being hit by lightning during a pre-season friendly against Hvidovre.

Police spokesman Brian Munch said the 24-year-old may have been hit in the chest or head by the strike and confirmed that the bolt also knocked five or six other players who were nearby to the ground.

FRANCE

Nightmare start for new No1

Lille's new goalkeeper Mickael Landreau is expected to be out of action for six months after he tore cruciate ligament in his right knee during a training session, just five days after joining his new club from Paris Saint-Germain on a three-year deal.

GERMANY

Silva sidelined for the season

Hamburg's Brazilian defender Alex Silva will miss most of the new campaign after injuring a knee in a friendly against Austria's Wacker Innsbruck.

HUNGARY

Super Cup win

Debrecen won the season-opening Super Cup, beating Honved 1-0 with a goal from Peter Szilagyi.

NORWAY

United sign star

Molde's Senegalese striker Mame Biram Diouf has signed for Manchester United, but will stay in Norway on loan until January.

The 21-year-old will join Molde old boy Ole Gunnar Solskjaer at Old Trafford, where he is reserve team manager.

Out...Silva

Rapid Wien (Aut) 5 Vilaznia 0
Rosenborg 0 Karabakh (Aze) 0
Rudar Velenje 0 Red Star Belgrade (Ser) 1
Sarajevo (Bos) 1 Spartak Trnava 0
Sevojno (Ser) 0 FBK Kaunas (Lit) 0
Sigma Olomouc (Cze) 1 Fram 1
Skonto (Lat) 1 Derry (Ire) 1
Sliema (Mlt) 0 Maccabi Netanya (Isr) 0
St Patrick's (Ire) 1 Valletta 1
Steaua Bucharest (Rom) 2 Ujpest (Hun) 0
Sturm Graz (Aut) 2 Siroki Brijeg 1
Suduva 0 Randers 1
Tobol (Kaz) 1 Galatasaray (Tur) 1
Vetra 0 HJK Helsinki 1
Zestafoni 1 Helsingborgs 2
Zilina (Slk) 2 Dacia (Mol) 0
Zimbru 0 Pacos Ferreira (Por) 0

3rd qualifying round

Direct entrants: Aberdeen (Sco), APOP (Cyp), Athletic Bilbao (Spa), Austria Wien (Aut), Club Brugge (Blg), CSKA Sofia (Bul), Fenerbahce (Tur), Fredrikstad (Nor), Fulham (Eng), Hajduk Split (Cro), Hamburg (Ger), Hapoel Tel Aviv (Isr), Honved (Hun), IFK Gothenburg (Swe), Interblock (Sln), Kosice (Slk), Krylia Sovetov (Rus), Lech Poznan (Pol), Lille (Fra), Metalist (Ukr), OB Odense (Den), PAOK Salonika (Gre), PSV Eindhoven (Hol), Roma (Ita), Slovan Liberec (Cze), Sporting Braga (Por), Valerenga (Nor), Vaslui (Rom), Vojvodina (Ser), Young Boys (Swi)

4th qualifying round

Direct entrants*: AEK Athens (Gre), Ajax (Hol), Amkar (Rus), Aston Villa (Eng), Benfica (Por), CFR Cluj (Rom), Dinamo Bucharest (Rom), Everton (Eng), Genk (Blg), Genoa (Ita), Guingamp (Fra), Hearts (Sco), Heerenveen (Hol), Hertha Berlin (Ger), Lazio (Ita), Litex Lovech (Bul), Nacional (Por), Sion (Swi), Teplice (Cze), Toulouse (Fra), Trabzonspor (Tur), Valencia (Spa), Villarreal (Spa), Vorskla (Ukr), Werder Bremen (Ger), Zenit St Petersburg (Rus)
**The 15 losing teams from the Champions League 3rd qualifying round also enter at this stage*

The 4th qualifying round winners enter the group stage, along with the 10 losing teams from the Champions League 4th qualifying round

AUSTRIA

July 17: Wiener Neustadt 3 Austria Karnten 1.
July 18: Kapfenberger 0 Ried 1; LASK 4 Mattersburg 0.
July 19: Salzburg 2 Austria Wien 1.

AUSTRIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
LASK	1	1	0	0	4	0	3
W Neustadt	1	1	0	0	3	1	3
Salzburg	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Ried	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Rapid	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sturm	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Austria Wien	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Kapfenberger	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
A Karnten	1	0	0	1	1	3	0
Mattersburg	1	0	0	1	0	4	0

DENMARK

July 18: Nordsjaelland 2 Copenhagen 0; Midtjylland 0 Esbjerg 0.
July 19: SonderjyskE 1 Randers 0; HB Koge 1 Silkeborg 1; Brondby 2 OB 2.

DENMARK	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nordsjaelland	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
SonderjyskE	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Brondby	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
OB	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
HB Koge	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Silkeborg	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Esbjerg	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Midtjylland	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
AaB	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
AGF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Randers	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Copenhagen	1	0	0	1	0	2	0

FINLAND

June 24: Haka 3 Lahti 0; Jaro 0 Mariehamn 0; TPS 3 RoPS 2; Honka 4 KuPS 1.
June 25: VPS 3 JJK 2.
June 27: Lahti 2 Tampere 1; TPS 3 MyPa 1.
June 28: Haka 0 Jaro 0; RoPS 1 Honka 2; HJK 2 Inter 0.
July 1: VPS 3 HJK 4; Tampere 3 Inter 2; RoPS 2 JJK 1.
July 4: KuPS 3 RoPS 0; Tampere 1 JJK 0.
July 5: Inter 1 Lahti 1; MyPa 0 Haka 2; Jaro 0 HJK 2; Mariehamn 0 VPS 0.
July 6: Honka 0 TPS 0.
July 11: Inter 1 Mariehamn 1.
July 12: Lahti 1 Honka 1; RoPS 5 Jaro 3; KuPS 0 HJK 3; VPS 0 Tampere 1.
July 13: Haka 0 TPS 3; JJK 0 MyPa 1.
July 18: JJK 1 Inter 0; Haka 0 VPS 1.
July 19: Honka 1 Mariehamn 1; TPS 1 HJK 1; KuPS 1 Lahti 1; MyPa 4 RoPS 0.

FINLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
HJK	15	9	4	2	27	12	31
TPS	15	7	6	2	25	13	27
Haka	15	8	3	4	20	11	27
Mariehamn	15	5	9	1	15	8	24
Honka	15	5	8	2	28	18	23
Inter	15	6	3	6	15	15	21
Tampere	14	7	0	7	14	16	21
VPS	15	6	2	7	16	18	20
Jaro	14	5	4	5	21	19	19
MyPa	14	5	4	5	16	15	19
Lahti	15	4	7	4	20	21	19
RoPS	15	3	2	10	15	33	11
JJK	14	2	4	8	11	22	10
KuPS	15	2	2	11	9	31	8

ICELAND

June 25: Stjarnan 3 Valur 0; KR 2 Grindavik 0; Keflavik 3 Throttur 2; Fram 0 FH 2.
June 28: Throttur 1 Fylkir 2; IBV 0 FH 3; Fjolnir 1 Fram 2; Grindavik 1 Keflavik 1.
June 29: KR 3 Breidablik 2.
July 1: Fylkir 3 IBV 0.
July 2: Breidablik 0 Fjolnir 0; Stjarnan 1 KR 1; Valur 0 FH 5.
July 9: Fjolnir 3 Stjarnan 1; FH 3 Fylkir 2.
July 11: KR 3 Valur 4.
July 12: IBV 2 Keflavik 2.
July 13: Throttur 1 Fram 3; Grindavik 0 Breidablik 1.
July 18: FH 2 Keflavik 2.
July 19: Grindavik 4 Stjarnan 2; Fjolnir 1 KR 2.

ICELAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FH	13	11	1	1	37	10	34
KR	13	7	3	3	25	17	24
Stjarnan	12	6	2	4	28	19	20
Fylkir	11	6	2	3	21	13	20
Keflavik	12	5	5	2	22	19	20
Valur	11	6	1	4	15	19	19
Breidablik	11	4	3	4	16	17	15
Fram	11	4	2	5	14	14	14
Grindavik	12	3	2	7	15	26	11
Fjolnir	12	2	2	8	14	25	8
IBV	11	2	1	8	9	21	7
Throttur	11	1	2	8	10	26	5

LATVIA

June 26: Blazma 1 Dinaburg 2; Daugava 1 Metalurgs 4.
June 27: Olimps/RFS 1 Skonto 8.
June 28: Tranzits 1 Jurmala 2.
June 30: Daugava 0 Ventspils 5.
July 1: Olimps/RFS 1 Metalurgs 5; Blazma 0 Skonto 1.
July 4: Skonto 4 Tranzits 1; Ventspils 5 Olimps/RFS 3; Metalurgs 6 Blazma 0.
July 8: Ventspils 5 Blazma 0; Jurmala 0 Skonto 5; Olimps/RFS 7 Daugava 0; Tranzits 1 Metalurgs 0.
July 19: Tranzits 0 Olimps/RFS 2.

LATVIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ventspils	19	14	3	2	55	15	45
Metalurgs	19	14	3	2	53	13	45
Skonto	19	14	2	3	60	17	44
Dinaburg	16	7	4	5	19	17	25
Jurmala	17	7	4	6	22	30	25
Olimps/RFS	20	6	4	10	34	42	22
Tranzits	19	1	7	11	12	34	10
Blazma	19	2	3	14	10	52	9
Daugava	18	1	4	13	17	62	7

LITHUANIA

June 28: Banga 1 Tauras 1; LKKA 0 Siauliai 2; Kruoja 0 Vetra 3; Ekranas 2 Suduva 2.
July 5: Siauliai 4 Banga 0; Tauras 2 Kruoja 0; Suduva 2 LKKA 0.

LITHUANIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Suduva	14	9	5	0	31	6	32
Vetra	13	8	4	1	30	11	28
Ekranas	13	8	4	1	24	11	28
Siauliai	14	6	0	8	19	14	18
Tauras	14	4	4	6	12	14	16
Banga	14	4	4	6	13	23	16
LKKA	14	2	2	10	9	30	8
Kruoja	14	1	3	10	11	40	6

MOLDOVA

July 5: CSCA-Rapid 2 Dinamo 1; Sfintul Gheorghe 0 Nistru 0; Olimpia 1 Viitorul 0; Iskra-Stal 1 Tiraspol 0; Academia 1 Dacia 1.
July 10: CSCA-Rapid 0 Sheriff 6.
July 11: Dinamo 2 Dacia 3; Viitorul 0 Iskra-Stal 3; Nistru 0 Olimpia 6; Tiraspol 1 Academia 1.
July 18: Sfintul Gheorghe 0 CSCA-Rapid 2.
July 19: Academia 0 Viitorul 2.

MOLDOVA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olimpia	2	2	0	0	7	0	6
Iskra-Stal	2	2	0	0	4	0	6
CSCA-Rapid	3	2	0	1	4	7	6
Dacia	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
Sheriff	1	1	0	0	6	0	3
S Gheorghe	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
Viitorul	3	1	0	2	2	4	3
Academia	3	0	2	1	2	4	2
Tiraspol	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Zimbru	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dinamo	2	0	0	2	3	5	0
Nistru	2	0	0	2	0	9	0

NORWAY

June 24: Fredrikstad 2 Lyn 1; Valerenga 2 Bodo/Glimt 1; Start 3 Sandefjord 2; Tromso 0 Viking 1; Odd Grenland 2 Stromsgodset 1; Rosenborg 1 Stabaek 0.
June 25: Lillestrom 0 Molde 1; Brann 2 Aalesund 1.
June 28: Stromsgodset 1 Sandefjord 1; Tromso 3 Aalesund 1; Odd Grenland 2 Viking 2; Fredrikstad 2 Bodo/Glimt 2; Molde 4 Lyn 0; Valerenga 1 Rosenborg 2.
June 29: Stabaek 2 Brann 1.
July 1: Lillestrom 3 Start 2.
July 4: Sandefjord 1 Odd Grenland 2.
July 5: Lyn 2 Stabaek 2; Start 2 Stromsgodset 2; Viking 4 Lillestrom 2; Bodo/Glimt 2 Molde 4; Aalesund 3 Valerenga 2.
July 6: Brann 2 Fredrikstad 1.
July 11: Stabaek 2 Viking 0.
July 12: Fredrikstad 1 Sandefjord 2; Odd Grenland 1 Start 2; Lillestrom 1 Aalesund 1; Lyn 0 Bodo/Glimt 1; Stromsgodset 0 Rosenborg 1; Molde 5 Brann 2.
July 13: Tromso 2 Valerenga 0.

NORWAY	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rosenborg	17	12	5	0	34	12	41
Molde	18	11	4	3	36	21	37
Odd Grenland	18	7	8	3	33	24	29
Start	18	7	7	4	33	28	28
Stabaek	18	7	6	5	29	19	27
Brann	18	7	5	6	30	30	26
Valerenga	18	7	4	7	30	29	25
Viking	18	6	6	6	23	24	24
Aalesund	18	6	4	8	20	28	22
Tromso	17	5	6	6	23	25	21
Sandefjord	18	5	6	7	24	28	21
Lillestrom	18	4	7	7	24	31	19
Fredrikstad	18	5	3	10	21	27	18
Stromsgodset	18	4	5	9	17	25	17
Bodo/Glimt	18	4	5	9	18	34	17
Lyn	18	1	9	8	16	26	12

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

July 3: Dundalk 1 Derry 0; Galway 0 Cork 2; Bray 1 Bohemians 3.
July 4: St Patrick's 1 Shamrock 2.
July 5: Sligo 2 Drogheda 2.
July 7: Cork 0 St Patrick's 1.
July 10: Derry 0 Drogheda 1; Dundalk 0 Bohemians 2; St Patrick's 1 Galway 2; Bray 1 Shamrock 2.
July 12: Sligo 0 Cork 3.
July 17: Drogheda 1 Bray 2; Galway 0 Dundalk 3.
July 18: Shamrock 3 Sligo 1.
July 19: Bohemians 1 Derry 0.

Off to Zenit...Kornilenko

RUSSIA
Players on the move in the Premier League

Zenit have agreed a deal to sign Belarus striker Sergei Kornilenko, who has scored six goals for 11th-place Tom so far this season.

Meanwhile, league leaders Rubin have signed Poland midfielder Rafal Murawski from Lech Poznan for a reported fee of £2.5million.

SERBIA
Foreign limits

New rules will limit clubs to playing no more than five foreigners from the start of 2010-11. This will be reduced to four the following season.

"The decision has been made to give home-bred prospects a chance to show their skill and develop," explained football federation president Tomislav Karadzic.

SPAIN
Smash puts Atletico defender out of action

Atletico Madrid defender Mariano Pernia will miss the start of the season after puncturing a lung and fracturing bones in a car accident.

UKRAINE
Gassaev makes mark

Dynamo beat Vorskla on penalties to win the season's curtain-raiser, the Super Cup, for the third time in four seasons and earn new coach Valeri Gazzaev his first trophy with the club.

0 goals Estudiantes conceded at home in the Libertadores

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bohemians	20	14	2	4	33	11	44
Shamrock	20	11	6	3	29	16	39
Cork	20	11	3	6	24	13	36
Derry	20	10	4	6	25	14	34
Dundalk	20	8	2	10	21	24	26
St Patrick's	20	7	2	11	18	29	23
Galway	20	6	4	10	17	26	22
Drogheda	20	4	7	9	14	23	19
Sligo	20	4	6	10	17	29	18
Bray	20	4	6	10	17	30	18

RUSSIA

July 6: Khimki 2 Rubin 3.
July 10: Khimki 1 Saturn 0.
July 11: Amkar 3 Dynamo 1; Krylia Sovetov 1 Rubin 2; Terek 1 CSKA 1; Rostov 0 Spartak Moscow 1.
July 12: Zenit 1 FC Moscow 0; Lokomotiv 0 Tom 0; Kuban 2 Spartak Nalchik 2.
July 18: Rubin 1 CSKA 2; Saturn 4 Rostov 0; Dynamo 2 Spartak Nalchik 1.
July 19: Spartak Moscow 1 Krylia Sovetov 1; Tom 4 Khimki 0; Terek 3 Zenit 2; FC Moscow 4 Kuban 1; Amkar 1 Lokomotiv 1.

RUSSIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rubin	14	8	3	3	27	12	27
FC Moscow	14	7	5	2	17	7	26
Spartak M	14	7	3	4	22	12	24
CSKA	13	7	2	4	21	12	23
Dynamo	14	7	2	5	16	16	23
Zenit	14	6	4	4	22	15	22
Krylia Sovetov	14	6	3	5	15	14	21
Terek	14	5	5	4	17	19	20
Lokomotiv	14	4	6	4	14	15	18
Rostov	14	4	6	4	10	13	18
Tom	14	4	4	6	13	17	16
Saturn	14	4	4	6	13	19	16
Amkar	14	3	6	5	13	20	15
Kuban	14	3	5	6	10	18	14
Spartak N	13	1	6	6	11	15	9
Khimki	14	1	4	9	11	28	7

SLOVAKIA

July 10: Slovan 3 Senica 0.
July 11: Petrzalka 0 Tatran 1; Ruzomberok 1 Dubnica 1; Kosice 2 DAC 0; Zilina 1 Nitra 1.
July 12: Spartak 0 Dukla 0.
July 18: Senica 3 Tatran 2; Dukla 0 Kosice 0; Dubnica 0 Petrzalka 0; DAC 1 Ruzomberok 1.
July 19: Nitra 1 Spartak 0.

SLOVAKIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kosice	2	1	1	0	2	0	4
Nitra	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Slovan	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
Tatran	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
Senica	2	1	0	1	3	5	3
Ruzomberok	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Dubnica	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Dukla	2	0	2	0	0	0	2
Zilina	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Petrzalka	2	0	1	1	0	1	1
Spartak	2	0	1	1	0	1	1
DAC	2	0	1	1	1	3	1

SLOVENIA

July 17: Domzale 2 Drava 2.
July 18: Koper 1 Celje 0; Maribor 0 Gorica 1; Olimpija 1 Interblock 3.
July 19: Rudar 2 Nafta 0.

SLOVENIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Interblock	1	1	0	0	3	1	3
Rudar	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Gorica	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Koper	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Domzale	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Drava	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Celje	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Maribor	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Olimpija	1	0	0	1	1	3	0
Nafta	1	0	0	1	0	2	0

SWEDEN

July 4: Hammarby 2 Trelleborgs 1; Brommapojkarna 1 GAIS 0.
July 5: Orebro 1 AIK 1; Djurgardens 2 Helsingborgs 1; Gefle 1 Hacken 1.
July 6: Elfsborg 3 Orgryte 0; Malmo 1 Kalmar 2; Halmstads 0 IFK 0.
July 11: Kalmar 6 Djurgardens 1.
July 12: Helsingborgs 3 Elfsborg 2; Brommapojkarna 1 Malmo 1; GAIS 1 Halmstads 1.
July 13: Orgryte 2 Gefle 2; AIK 1 IFK 0; Trelleborgs 0 Orebro 1.
July 16: Hacken 2 Hammarby 0.
July 18: Kalmar 3 Brommapojkarna 1.
July 19: IFK 3 Trelleborgs 1; Djurgardens 1 Elfsborg 2; Gefle 0 Helsingborgs 2.

SWEDEN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
IFK	15	10	1	4	27	10	31
Elfsborg	15	8	6	1	23	10	30
Helsingborgs	15	9	1	5	25	18	28
Kalmar	15	8	3	4	28	15	27
AIK	14	8	2	4	12	9	26
Orebro	14	6	4	4	14	10	22
Gefle	15	5	6	4	16	16	21
Trelleborgs	15	5	4	6	17	16	19
Hacken	14	5	3	6	16	16	18
Halmstads	14	4	6	4	14	15	18
Malmo	14	4	5	5	12	12	17
Bromm'karna	15	4	5	6	16	22	17
Hammarby	14	4	3	7	12	18	15
Djurgardens	15	4	2	9	10	30	14
GAIS	14	2	6	6	18	22	12
Orgryte	14	0	3	11	7	28	3

SWITZERLAND

July 11: Aarau 1 Grasshopper 0.
July 12: Bellinzona 1 Xamax 1; St Gallen 2 Basle 0.
July 14: Zurich 2 Young Boys 3.
July 18: Xamax 3 Zurich 0; Young Boys 1 St Gallen 1.
July 19: Basle 2 Aarau 1; Bellinzona 1 Lucerne 2; Grasshopper 3 Sion 1.

SWITZERLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Xamax	2	1	1	0	4	1	4
St Gallen	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Young Boys	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
Grasshopper	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
Lucerne	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Aarau	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Basle	2	1	0	1	2	3	3
Bellinzona	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
Sion	1	0	0	1	1	3	0
Zurich	2	0	0	2	2	6	0

UKRAINE

July 17: Illichivets 1 Zakarpattya 0.
July 18: Dynamo 5 Chornomorets 0; Shakhtar 3 Kryvbas 0; Vorskla 1 Karpaty 2; Zorya 0 Arsenal 0.
July 19: Metalurh Donetsk 0 Dnipro 0; Obolon 0 Metalist 2; Tavriya 2 Metalurh Zaporizhya 0.

UKRAINE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dynamo	1	1	0	0	5	0	3
Shakhtar	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
Metalist	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Tavriya	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Karpaty	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Illichivets	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Arsenal	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Dnipro	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Metalurh D	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Zorya	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Vorskla	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Zakarpattya	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Metalurh Z	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
Obolon	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
Kryvbas	1	0	0	1	0	3	0
Chornomorets	1	0	0	1	0	5	0

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

Semi-finals, 1st legs

June 24
Cruzeiro (Bra) 3 (Wellington Paulista 38, Wagner 47, Fabinho 67)
Gremio (Bra) 1 (Souza 78)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 51,696. **Ref:** Osses (Chl)
Cruzeiro: Fabio - Jonathan, Leonardo Silva, Thiago Heleno, Marquinhos Parana, Fabinho, Elicarlos (Jancarlos 85), Henrique, Wagner (Bernardo 86), Kleber, Wellington Paulista.
Gremio: Marcelo - Thiego, Leo, Rever, Fabio Santos, Adilson, Tulio, Tcheco, Souza, Alex Mineiro (Herrera 69), Lopez.

June 25
Estudiantes (Arg) 1 (Galvan 14)
Nacional (Uru) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ortube (Bol)
Estudiantes: Andujar - Cellay (Diaz 80), Schiavi, Desabato, Re, Galvan (Nunez 58), Brana, Veron (Sanchez 46), Benitez, G Fernandez, Boselli.
Nacional: Munoz - Victorino, Rodriguez, Coates, Romero, Fernandez (Dominguez 73), Arismendi, O Morales, Lodeiro, Medina (Garcia 46), Biscayzacu (A Morales 65).

Semi-finals, 2nd legs

July 1
Nacional 1 (Medina 75)
Estudiantes 2 (Boselli 52, 90)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 46,983. **Ref:** Torres (Par)
Estudiantes 3-1 on agg
Nacional: Munoz - Victorino, Coates, Romero, Rodriguez (Fernandez 68), O Morales, Arismendi, Dominguez (Garcia 59), A Morales (Lodeiro 46), Mondaini, Medina.
Estudiantes: Andujar - Re, Schiavi, Desabato, Diaz, Perez (Galvan 71), Brana, Sanchez, Benitez, G Fernandez (Salgueiro 68), Boselli (Calderon 90+).

July 2
Gremio 2 (Rever 54, Souza 74)
Cruzeiro 2 (Wellington Paulista 34, 36)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 40,452. **Ref:** Ruiz (Col)
Cruzeiro 5-3 on agg
Gremio: Victor - Thiego, Leo, Rever, Fabio Santos, Adilson, Tulio, Souza, Tcheco, Herrera (Perea 78), Lopez. *Sent off: Adilson 60min.*
Cruzeiro: Fabio - Jonathan, Thiago Heleno, Leonardo Silva (Anderson 51), Gerson Magrao (Elicarlos 60), Marquinhos Parana, Ramires, Fabinho, Wagner, Wellington Paulista (Thiago Ribeiro 71), Kleber.

Final, 1st leg

July 8
Estudiantes 0
Cruzeiro 0
Att: 40,000. **Ref:** Larrionda (Uru)
Estudiantes: Andujar - Cellay, Desabato, Schiavi, Re, Perez, Veron, Brana, Benitez (Nunez 74), Boselli, G Fernandez (Salgueiro 81).
Cruzeiro: Fabio - Jonathan, Anderson, Leonardo Silva, Gerson Magrao (Fabinho 85), Henrique, Marquinhos Parana, Ramires, Wagner, Wellington Paulista, Kleber.

Final, 2nd leg

July 15
Cruzeiro 1 (Henrique 52)
Estudiantes 2 (G Fernandez 57, Boselli 72)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 64,800. **Ref:** Chandia (Chl)
Estudiantes 2-1 on agg
Cruzeiro: Fabio - Jonathan, Leonardo Silva, Thiago Heleno, Gerson Magrao, Ramires, Marquinhos Parana, Henrique, Wagner (Athirson 71), Wellington Paulista (Thiago Ribeiro 75), Kleber.
Estudiantes: Andujar - Cellay, Desabato, Schiavi, Re, Perez, Brana (Sanchez 87), Veron, Benitez (Diaz 80), Boselli, G Fernandez (Calderon 90).

RECOPA

2008 Libertadores Cup winners (LDU) v 2008 Sudamericana Cup winners (Internacional)

1st leg

June 25
Internacional (Bra) 0
LDU Quito (Ecu) 1 (Bieler 57)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 30,284. **Ref:** Soto (Ven)
Sent off: Bolivar (Internacional) 72min

2nd leg

July 9
LDU Quito 3 (Espinola 9, Bieler 39, Vera 53)
Internacional 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Chandia (Chl)
LDU 4-0 on agg

SUDAMERICANA CUP

Preliminary round draw

Alianza Atletico (Per) v Anzoategui (Ven)
Atletico Mineiro (Bra) v Goias (Bra)
Atletico Paranaense (Bra) v Botafogo (Bra)
Blooming (Bol) v 1st Uruguay reps (Uru)
Boca Juniors (Arg) v Velez Sarsfield (Arg)
Cerro Porteno (Par) v La Paz (Bol)
Fluminense (Bra) v Flamengo (Bra)
La Equidad (Col) v Union Espanola (Chl)
LDU Quito (Ecu) v Libertad (Par)
River Plate (Arg) v Lanus (Arg)
Tigre (Arg) v San Lorenzo (Arg)
Universidad de Chile (Chl) v Deportivo Cali (Col)
2nd Uruguay reps (Uru) v Cienciano (Per)
Vitoria (Bra) v Coritiba (Bra)
Zamora (Ven) v Emelec (Ecu)
Competition scheduled to start August 5

Bye to last 16: Internacional (Bra; holders)

Cup holder...Ronaldo

BRAZIL

Ronaldo to re-sign

Ronaldo hopes to extend his contract with Corinthians after they beat Internacional 4-2 on aggregate to win the Brazilian Cup and qualify for next year's Libertadores Cup. "I think that it's possible," said the 32-year-old striker. "We will see in December, now I only want to celebrate."

Corinthians have signed former Brazil and Arsenal midfielder Edu on a free transfer from Valencia.

MEXICO

No more clubs in the Sudamericana Cup

Monterrey and Puebla have both been pulled out of this year's Sudamericana Cup after it was announced that clubs from CONCACAF will no longer compete in the tournament. And while the federation's teams will take part in next year's Libertadores Cup, CONCACAF general secretary Chuck Blazer said they will review future participation in the event in November.

Atlante have signed former Argentina midfielder Santiago Solari. The 32-year-old, who began his professional career at River Plate, spent 10 years in Europe with Atletico Madrid, Real Madrid and Inter before returning to Argentina in 2008 to play for San Lorenzo.

Cameroon midfielder Alain N'Kong has joined Indios Juarez, while Angola midfielder Antonio Mendonca has linked up with Puebla.

America have signed Colombian defender Aquivaldo Mosquera from Sevilla, and Emanuel Villa has joined Cruz Azul from Derby County.

ARGENTINA

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Friday, June 26
Arsenal 1 (Jara 32)
Independiente 1 (Mancuello 61)

Friday, July 3
Racing Club 2 (Martinez 21, Lucero 48)
Newell's Old Boys 1 (Machuca 2)

Saturday, July 4
Banfield 0
Tigre 3 (Luna 40, Broggi og 43, Rosano 54)

Colon Santa Fe 1 (Rivarola 40)
Boca Juniors 3 (Palermo 57, 69, Battaglia 68)

River Plate 1 (Buonanotte 65)
Estudiantes 2 (Calderon 25, Rojo 51)

Rosario Central 0
Godoy Cruz 1 (Borghello 24)

San Lorenzo 3 (Bergessio 15, 55, Torres 75)
Argentinos Juniors 0

Sunday, July 5
Gimnasia La Plata 2 (Romero 4, 68)
Gimnasia Jujuy 0

San Martin Tucuman 2 (Vega 52, Serrano 73)
Lanus 3 (Sand pen 2, 64, Lagos 86)

Velez Sarsfield 1 (Moralez 83)
Huracan 0

ARGENTINA – CLOSING – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Velez	19	11	7	1	29	13	40
Huracan	19	12	2	5	35	19	38
Lanus	19	12	2	5	32	26	38
Colon	19	10	4	5	29	19	34
Racing Club	19	8	6	5	23	21	30
Estudiantes	19	8	5	6	22	18	29
Gimnasia LP	19	7	7	5	23	21	28
River Plate	19	7	6	6	24	25	27
Godoy Cruz	19	7	5	7	23	26	26
Rosario	19	7	4	8	23	21	25
San Lorenzo	19	7	3	9	27	26	24
Banfield	19	6	5	8	25	25	23
Tigre	19	6	5	8	24	25	23
Boca Juniors	19	6	4	9	22	25	22
Newell's	19	4	9	6	21	22	21
Independiente	19	6	3	10	22	36	21
San Martin (R)*	19	5	5	9	20	23	20
Arsenal	19	4	6	9	19	30	18
Gimnasia J (R)*	19	4	5	10	15	24	17
Argentinos Jrs	19	2	9	8	19	32	15

**Relegation determined by average points gained over three most recent seasons*

TOP GOALSCORERS

13 Jose Sand (Lanus)
12 Esteban Fuertes (Colon Santa Fe)
12 Daniel Montenegro (Independiente)
11 Rodrigo Lopez (Velez Sarsfield)
11 Carlos Luna (Tigre)

Promoted: Atletico Tucuman, Chacarita Juniors

BOLIVIA

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

June 24: Nacional 1 Real Potosi 1; Universitario 4 Real Mamore 1; Blooming 0 Bolivar 2.
June 25: San Jose 5 La Paz 0; The Strongest 1 Aurora 0; Jorge Wilstermann 1 Oriente 1.
June 28: Real Mamore 5 Nacional 4; Real Potosi 3 La Paz 1; San Jose 2 Jorge Wilstermann 1; Bolivar 1 Oriente 0; Aurora 1 Universitario 0; Blooming 1 The Strongest 1.
July 5: Blooming 1 San Jose 0; Real Mamore 1 Bolivar 2; Aurora 1 Real Potosi 4; The Strongest 5 Oriente 3; Universitario 2 Jorge Wilstermann 0; Nacional 2 La Paz 2.

BOLIVIA – OPENING – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bolivar	22	11	7	4	36	22	40
Real Potosi	22	11	6	5	45	31	39
San Jose	22	11	2	9	53	35	35
Oriente	22	10	5	7	33	30	35
Universitario*	22	11	3	8	37	27	33
The Strongest	22	9	5	8	36	35	32
La Paz	22	9	5	8	38	39	32
Nacional	22	7	7	8	36	40	28
Blooming	22	7	6	9	24	32	27
Aurora	22	7	5	10	26	33	26
J Wilstermann	22	3	8	11	22	38	17
Real Mamore	22	4	5	13	25	50	17

**3pts deducted for playing too few Bolivian players during a game*

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Group A

July 19: San Jose 4 Blooming 0; Bolivar 3 Nacional 2; Jorge Wilstermann 1 Universitario 1.

BOLIVIA – CLOSING – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
San Jose	1	1	0	0	4	0	3
Bolivar	1	1	0	0	3	2	3
J Wilstermann	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Universitario	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Nacional	1	0	0	1	2	3	0
Blooming	1	0	0	1	0	4	0

Group B

July 18: The Strongest 1 Real Potosi 1.
July 19: La Paz 1 Aurora 0.

BOLIVIA – CLOSING – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
La Paz	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Real Potosi	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
The Strongest	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Oriente	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Real Mamore	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Aurora	1	0	0	1	0	1	0

BRAZIL

June 27: Sao Paulo 2 Nautico 0; Barueri 4 Atletico Mineiro 2; Atletico Paranaense 1 Corinthians 0; Cruzeiro 1 Avai 0; Botafogo 1 Goias 4.
June 28: Palmeiras 1 Santos 1; Internacional 3 Coritiba 0; Vitoria 4 Santo Andre 1; Sport Recife 3 Gremio 1; Fluminense 0 Flamengo 0.
July 4: Santos 1 Sport Recife 0; Santo Andre 1 Barueri 1; Flamengo 2 Vitoria 1.
July 5: Atletico Mineiro 1 Botafogo 1; Coritiba 2 Sao Paulo 0; Goias 1 Cruzeiro 0; Gremio 4 Atletico Paranaense 1; Avai 0 Palmeiras 3; Nautico 0 Internacional 2.
July 8: Corinthians 4 Fluminense 2.
July 11: Avai 1 Botafogo 2; Barueri 3 Coritiba 1; Palmeiras 4 Nautico 1.
July 12: Sao Paulo 2 Flamengo 2; Atletico Paranaense 3 Internacional 2; Gremio 3 Corinthians 0; Cruzeiro 0 Atletico Mineiro 3; Fluminense 0 Santo Andre 1; Vitoria 6 Santos 2; Sport Recife 1 Goias 0.
July 15: Coritiba 2 Gremio 1; Goias 0 Avai 2; Santo Andre 1 Atletico Paranaense 0; Santos 3 Barueri 3; Internacional 4 Fluminense 2; Flamengo 1 Palmeiras 2.
July 16: Atletico Mineiro 2 Sao Paulo 0; Nautico 1 Vitoria 1; Corinthians 4 Sport Recife 3.
July 18: Fluminense 1 Goias 4; Palmeiras 1 Santo Andre 0.
July 19: Vitoria 0 Atletico Mineiro 0; Cruzeiro 1 Corinthians 2; Gremio 2 Internacional 1; Sao Paulo 2 Santos 1; Atletico Paranaense 0 Coritiba 0; Barueri 4 Nautico 0; Sport Recife 1 Avai 3; Flamengo 2 Botafogo 2.

BRAZIL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
At Mineiro	12	7	4	1	25	12	25
Palmeiras	12	7	4	1	22	12	25
Internacional	12	7	2	3	19	13	23
Vitoria	12	6	3	3	21	13	21
Barueri	12	5	6	1	28	17	21
Corinthians	12	6	2	4	18	16	20
Gremio	12	5	3	4	20	13	18
Goias	12	4	5	3	22	17	17
Santo Andre	12	4	5	3	16	16	17
Flamengo	12	4	4	4	17	20	16
Coritiba	12	4	2	6	17	20	14
Sao Paulo	12	3	5	4	13	14	14
Santos	12	3	5	4	24	26	14
Avai	12	3	4	5	15	18	13
At Paranaense	12	3	3	6	13	22	12
Sport Recife	12	3	2	7	18	21	11
Botafogo	11	2	5	4	14	18	11
Cruzeiro	11	3	1	7	10	19	10
Fluminense	12	2	4	6	11	21	10
Nautico	12	2	3	7	11	26	9

CHILE

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP
Semi-finals

1st legs - June 24/25; 2nd legs - June 27/29
Everton v Universidad de Chile
1-0, 1-3 (agg 2-3)
Universidad Catolica v Union Espanola
0-0, 0-0 (agg 0-0; Union Espanola 4-2 on pens)

Final, 1st leg

July 4
Universidad de Chile 1 (Hernandez 64)
Union Espanola 1 (Aravena 20)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Chandia

Final, 2nd leg

July 7
Union Espanola 0
Universidad de Chile 1 (Olivera 64)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Pozo
Sent off: Gonzalez (Univ de Chile) 79min
Universidad de Chile 2-1 on agg

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP
League stage

July 10: Audax Italiano 2 Nublense 1.
July 11: Univ de Concepcion 2 Huachipato 4; O'Higgins 2 Cobresal 0; Dep La Serena 2 Rangers 0.
July 12: Colo Colo 1 Curico Unido 1; Cobreloa 3 Santiago Morning 0; Univ Catolica 2 Municipal 0.
July 17: O'Higgins 0 Palestino 1.
July 18: Colo Colo 2 Dep La Serena 1; Huachipato 1 Union Espanola 2; Santiago Morning 0 Audax Italiano 1.
July 19: Univ de Chile 3 Rangers 5; Cobresal 1 Univ Catolica 1; Everton 0 Univ de Concepcion 1; Curico Unido 1 Municipal 1; Nublense 1 Cobreloa 2.

CHILE – CLOSING

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cobreloa	2	2	0	0	5	1	6
Audax Italiano	2	2	0	0	3	1	6
Univ Catolica	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Colo Colo	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
Huachipato	2	1	0	1	5	4	3
Dep La Serena	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
O'Higgins	2	1	0	1	2	1	3
U Espanola	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Palestino	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Rangers	2	1	0	1	5	5	3
U Concepcion	2	1	0	1	3	4	3
Curico Unido	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Cobresal	2	0	1	1	1	3	1
Municipal	2	0	1	1	1	3	1
Everton	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Univ de Chile	1	0	0	1	3	5	0
Nublense	2	0	0	2	2	4	0
S Morning	2	0	0	2	0	4	0

COLOMBIA

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP
Final, 1st leg

June 24
Once Caldas 2 (Romero 26, Fano 73)
Atletico Junior 1 (Hernandez 78)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 35,000. **Ref:** Machado

Final, 2nd leg

June 28
Atletico Junior 1 (Palacio 30)
Once Caldas 3 (Henriquez 17, Sinisterra 41, Perez 73)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 60,000. **Ref:** Ruiz
Once Caldas 5-2 on agg

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP
Regular season

July 10: At Nacional 1 La Equidad 1.
July 11: Cucuta 1 America 1; Once Caldas 1 Pereira 0.
July 12: Chico 2 At Huila 3; Cartagena 1 Indep Santa Fe 0; Dep Cali 2 Envigado 2; Dep Pasto 2 Indep Medellin 1; Tolima 1 Quindio 4; Millonarios 3 At Junior 1.
July 17: Envigado 2 Cartagena 2.
July 18: Quindio 1 Millonarios 1; Indep Medellin 1 Dep Cali 0.
July 19: At Huila 1 Tolima 0; At Junior 1 Cucuta 0; America 2 At Nacional 2; La Equidad 2 Once Caldas 1; Pereira 3 Dep Pasto 0; Indep Santa Fe 4 Chico 2.

COLOMBIA – CLOSING

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
At Huila	2	2	0	0	4	2	6
Quindio	2	1	1	0	5	2	4
Millonarios	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
Cartagena	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
La Equidad	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
Pereira	2	1	0	1	3	1	3
Ind Santa Fe	2	1	0	1	4	3	3
Ind Medellin	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Once Caldas	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
At Junior	2	1	0	1	2	3	3
Dep Pasto	2	1	0	1	2	4	3
Envigado	2	0	2	0	4	4	2
America	2	0	2	0	3	3	2
At Nacional	2	0	2	0	3	3	2
Dep Cali	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
Cucuta	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Chico	2	0	0	2	4	7	0
Tolima	2	0	0	2	1	5	0

GHANA
Hearts take title
Hearts of Oak claimed their 20th league crown after they beat Sporting Mirren 2-0 on the last day of the season to finish three points clear of Asante Kotoko.

MOROCCO
Brazilian new Raja boss
Former Brazil defender Carlos Mozer is the new coach of champions Raja Casablanca. The 48-year-old, who played in the 1990 World Cup finals and won the Angolan championship with Inter Luanda in 2007, takes over from Jose Romao.

NIGERIA
Enyimba win Cup
Enyimba won the Nigerian Cup, beating Sharks 1-0 in the Final with a goal from defender Musa Mustapha.

RWANDA
CECAFA champions
Atraco beat El Merreikh of Sudan 1-0 to win the CECAFA Club Championship. Hamisi Gitagenda, who was the tournament's top scorer, scored the winning goal for the club who have only been in existence for three years.

Cup win...Enyimba (in white)

SIERRA LEONE
Lions triumphant
East End Lions, who were undefeated all season, won the league and ended their season with a 2-1 win over Kallon FC.

BAHRAIN
More Cup success for Muharraq
Muharraq won the Crown Prince Cup for the fourth year,

ECUADOR

1st stage
June 28: Tecnico Univ 2 Macara 0; El Nacional 2 LDU Portoviejo 3; Dep Cuenca 0 Emelec 1; Olmedo 1 Dep Quito 0; Barcelona 0 Espoli 1.
July 1: Manta 0 LDU Quito 2.
July 5: Manta 1 Olmedo 1; LDU Quito 4 LDU Portoviejo 0; Dep Quito 0 Barcelona 2; Espoli 0 Tecnico Univ 2; Macara 3 Dep Cuenca 0; Emelec 2 El Nacional 0.
July 12: Dep Cuenca 0 Espoli 1; Tecnico Univ 1 Dep Quito 1; Olmedo 2 LDU Quito 3; LDU Portoviejo 1 Emelec 2; Barcelona 1 Manta 0; El Nacional 1 Macara 1.

ECUADOR – 1ST STAGE – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Emelec	22	13	4	5	30	17	43
LDU Quito	22	12	6	4	44	20	42
Macara	22	10	4	8	28	26	34
Olmedo	22	9	6	7	28	25	33
Espoli	22	10	3	9	29	29	33
El Nacional	22	8	5	9	24	21	29
Dep Quito	22	8	4	10	18	21	28
LDU P'viejo	22	8	4	10	22	35	28
Barcelona	22	7	5	10	19	21	26
Dep Cuenca	22	8	2	12	25	31	26
Tecnico Univ	22	6	6	10	29	41	24
Manta	22	6	5	11	15	24	23

Top four qualify for 3rd (final) stage, with 3, 2, 1 and 0 bonus points respectively

2nd stage
Group 1
July 18: LDU Quito 2 Dep Cuenca 2; LDU Portoviejo 2 Barcelona 0.
July 19: El Nacional 1 Macara 0.

ECUADOR – 2ND STAGE – GROUP 1	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
LDU P'viejo	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
El Nacional	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Dep Cuenca	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
LDU Quito	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Macara	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Barcelona	1	0	0	1	0	2	0

Group 2
July 17: Tecnico Univ 1 Espoli 2.
July 19: Emelec 1 Manta 1; Olmedo 0 Dep Quito 2.

ECUADOR – 2ND STAGE – GROUP 2	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dep Quito	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Espoli	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Emelec	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Manta	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Tecnico Univ	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Olmedo	1	0	0	1	0	2	0

PARAGUAY

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP
June 26: Sol de America 0 Nacional 3.
June 27: Tacuary 3 3 de Febrero 0; Olimpia 1 Guarani 1.
June 28: Rubio Nu 2 12 de Octubre 3; 2 de Mayo 1 Sportivo Luqueno 0; Cerro Porteno 0 Libertad 3.
July 3: 3 de Febrero 1 Olimpia 0; Guarani 1 2 de Mayo 0.
July 4: Nacional 1 Rubio Nu 2.
July 5: Sportivo Luqueno 1 Sol de America 0; 12 de Octubre 0 Cerro Porteno 1; Libertad 0 Tacuary 0.

PARAGUAY – OPENING – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cerro Porteno	22	14	4	4	24	11	46
Libertad	22	12	6	4	46	19	42
Nacional	22	9	9	4	37	23	36
Olimpia	22	9	8	5	31	28	35
Tacuary	22	9	5	8	27	29	32
S Luqueno	22	8	7	7	26	24	31
Guarani	22	7	8	7	21	17	29
Rubio Nu	22	8	2	12	30	34	26
Sol America	22	6	7	9	21	30	25
12 de Octubre	22	6	6	10	19	30	24
2 de Mayo	22	4	6	12	23	34	18
3 de Febrero	22	5	2	15	21	47	17

PERU

Regular season
June 24: Universidad SMP 0 Universitario 1.
June 27: Inti Gas 1 Jose Galvez 0; Alianza Lima 0 Melgar 2; Total Chalaco 1 Universitario 1; Colegio Nacional 2 Coronel Bolognesi 0.
June 28: Sport Ancash 0 Cesar Vallejo 1; Alianza Atletico 3 Huancayo 1; Cienciano 5 Sporting Cristal 5; Universidad SMP 4 Juan Aurich 1.
July 1: Universidad SMP 2 Cienciano 1.
July 4: Coronel Bolognesi 2 Alianza Atletico 1; Juan Aurich 4 Colegio Nacional 1; Universitario 2 Inti Gas 1; Melgar 1 Universidad SMP 0.
July 5: Huancayo 3 Sport Ancash 0; Sporting Cristal 0 Total Chalaco 1; Cesar Vallejo 0 Cienciano 1; Jose Galvez 1 Alianza Lima 3.
July 11: Alianza Atletico 0 Juan Aurich 0; Inti Gas 3 Sporting Cristal 1; Colegio Nacional 1 Melgar 0; Universidad SMP 1 Jose Galvez 1.
July 12: Total Chalaco 2 Cesar Vallejo 3; Sport Ancash 2 Coronel Bolognesi 2; Cienciano 0 Huancayo 3; Universitario 2 Alianza Lima 1.
July 18: Jose Galvez 1 Melgar 1; Colegio Nacional 0 Alianza Atletico 1; Sporting Cristal 1 Universitario 1.
July 19: Juan Aurich 2 Coronel Bolognesi 0; Sport Ancash 2 Cienciano 1; Alianza Lima 0 Universidad SMP 1; Huancayo 3 Cesar Vallejo 2; Total Chalaco 1 Inti Gas 1.

PERU – REGULAR SEASON	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Universitario	22	12	7	3	33	18	43
Huancayo	22	12	3	7	33	22	39
Juan Aurich	22	10	9	3	29	18	39
Univ SMP*	22	10	7	5	37	28	36
Al Lima	22	11	3	8	27	24	36
Inti Gas	22	9	7	6	26	19	34
Total Chalaco	22	9	6	7	34	26	33
Cesar Vallejo	22	9	5	8	27	24	32
Jose Galvez	22	9	5	8	23	25	32
S Cristal	22	9	4	9	43	28	31
Melgar	22	8	6	8	26	30	30
Cienciano	22	7	8	7	29	30	29
Al Atletico	22	5	6	11	20	33	21
Colegio	22	6	3	13	17	31	21
Sport Ancash	22	3	5	14	14	39	14
C Bolognesi	22	2	6	14	16	42	12

**1pt deducted*

URUGUAY

OVERALL CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFF
(opening winners v closing winners)

1st leg
June 21
Defensor 1 (De Souza 24)
Nacional 1 (Lodeiro 21)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Vazquez
Sent off: Rodriguez (Nacional) 60min

2nd leg
July 5
Nacional 1 (Romero 23)
Defensor 1 (Vera 44)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Ubriaco
Sent off: Lodeiro (Nacional) 75min
Agg 2-2

Deciding game
July 8
Nacional 3 (Garcia pen 32, Coates 74, Fernandez 77)
Defensor 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Silvera
Sent off: De Souza (Defensor) 61min

CENTRAL & NORTH AMERICA

CONCACAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary round draw
Cruz Azul (Mex) v Herediano (CR)
DC United (USA) v Chalatenango (EIS)
Jalapa (Gtm) v Pachuca (Mex)
Liberia (CR) v Real Espana (Hnd)
Olimpia (Hnd) v Arabe Unido (Pan)
San Francisco (Pan) v San Juan Jabloteh (T&T)
Toronto (Can) v Puerto Rico Islanders (PR)
W Connection (T&T) v New York Red Bulls (USA)
1st legs - July 28-30; 2nd legs - August 4-6

Group stage
Direct entrants: Columbus Crew (USA), Comunicaciones (Gtm), Houston Dynamo (USA), Marathon (Hnd), Metapan (EIS), Pumas UNAM (Mex), Saprissa (CR), Toluca (Mex)

COSTA RICA

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP Final
1st leg - May 24; 2nd leg - May 26
Liberia v Herediano
0-0, 3-0 (agg 3-0)

HONDURAS

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP Final
1st leg - May 16; 2nd leg - May 24
Real Espana v Olimpia
2-2, 1-2 (agg 3-4)

JAMAICA

JAMAICA – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tivoli Gdns	38	21	9	8	54	30	72
Portmore Utd	38	20	12	6	44	21	72
Harbour View	38	18	15	5	48	23	69
Boys Town	38	16	9	13	58	49	57
Arnett Gdns	38	15	11	12	36	32	56
Waterhouse	38	12	13	13	45	46	49

UNITED STATES

June 24: Toronto 2 New York 0; Colorado 1 Dallas 1.
June 27: Columbus 1 New York 0; Salt Lake 3 Toronto 0.
June 28: Seattle 3 Colorado 0; Los Angeles 1 Houston 0.
July 3: Salt Lake 1 San Jose 1.
July 4: Columbus 1 DC United 1; Colorado 1 Chicago 2; Kansas City 0 Houston 1; Dallas 2 New York 1; Los Angeles 1 New England 0.
July 11: Seattle 2 Houston 1; New England 0 Kansas City 0; Chicago 0 Columbus 0; Colorado 1 Dallas 0; San Jose 1 Toronto 3; Chivas 0 Los Angeles 1.
July 16: New York 1 Los Angeles 3.
July 18: Toronto 1 Houston 1; DC United 3 Colorado 1; Columbus 3 Salt Lake 1; Chicago 2 San Jose 0.
July 19: New England 2 Chivas 0.

UNITED STATES – EASTERN CONFERENCE	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Chicago	17	7	7	3	25	20	28
DC United	18	6	9	3	29	26	27
Columbus	18	6	9	3	25	22	27
Toronto	18	7	5	6	25	27	26
Kansas City	16	5	5	6	19	18	20
New England	15	5	5	5	17	21	20
New York	20	2	4	14	16	33	10

UNITED STATES – WESTERN CONFERENCE	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Houston	18	9	5	4	23	13	32
Seattle	17	7	7	3	26	16	28
Chivas	17	8	3	6	19	15	27
Los Angeles	18	6	9	3	22	19	27
Colorado	17	6	6	5	24	23	24
Salt Lake	17	5	5	7	24	21	20
Dallas	17	4	5	8	20	26	17
San Jose	17	3	4	10	19	33	13

AFRICA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A
July 18: Al Merreikh (Sud) 0 Al Hilal (Sud) 0.
July 19: Zesco United (Zam) 1 Kano Pillars (Nig) 1.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kano Pillars	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Zesco United	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Al Hilal	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Al Merreikh	1	0	1	0	0	0	1

Gripping...Mayanmar Cup Final

beating Al Riffa 2-0 in the Final with goals from Abdullah Saleh and Rico.

CHINA
Ailton joins Chongqing
Brazilian striker Ailton has signed for Chongqing. The 36-year-old was voted German Footballer of the Year in 2003-04, while at Werder Bremen, and became the first foreigner to win the award.

MYANMAR
Yadanarbon spot on
Yadanarbon beat Yangon United 4-1 on penalties to win the League Cup.

QATAR
Coaching changes
League champions Al Gharafa have appointed Caio Junior as coach. The 44-year-old Brazilian replaces his compatriot Marcos Paqueta, who has taken over from Paulo Autori at Al Rayyan.

UZBEKISTAN
Big Phil off to a flyer
Two goals from Chile striker Jose Luis Villanueva gave coach Luiz Felipe Scolari a winning start with Bunyodkor as his new club beat Nasaf 2-1 and ensured the team's 14th consecutive victory.

Bunyodkor boost...Scolari

Group B
July 19: Monomotapa (Zim) 2 Etoile Sahel (Tun) 1; TP Mazembe (DRC) 2 Heartland (Nig) 0.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
TP Mazembe	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Monomotapa	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Etoile Sahel	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Heartland	1	0	0	1	0	2	0

Remaining matchdays: July 31-Aug 2, Aug 14-16, Aug 28-30, Sep 11-13, Sep 18-20

Top two in each group qualify for semi-finals

CONFEDERATION CUP

Group A
July 19: ES Setif (Alg) 2 AS Vita Club (DRC) 0; Santos (Ang) 1 ENPPI (Egy) 0.

CONFEDERATION CUP – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
ES Setif	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Santos	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
ENPPI	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
AS Vita Club	1	0	0	1	0	2	0

Group B
July 17: Haras Hedood (Egy) 1 Bayelsa United (Nig) 0.
July 18: Stade Malien (Mli) 0 Primeiro Agosto (Ang) 0.

CONFEDERATION CUP – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Haras Hedood	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
P Agosto	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Stade Malien	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Bayelsa Utd	1	0	0	1	0	1	0

Remaining matchdays: July 31-Aug 2, Aug 14-16, Aug 28-30, Sep 11-13, Sep 18-20

Top two in each group qualify for semi-finals

ALGERIA

ALGERIA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
ES Setif	32	18	8	6	52	25	62
JS Kabylie	32	15	14	3	38	19	59
JSM Bejaia	32	15	8	9	33	20	53
CR Belouizdad	32	15	5	12	33	27	50
MC Alger	32	13	10	9	40	38	49
USM Alger	32	13	9	10	38	31	48
CABB*	32	14	7	11	34	33	48
MC El Eulma	32	13	7	12	37	35	46
ASO Chlef	32	11	11	10	40	43	44
USM Annaba	32	11	8	13	31	34	41
USM Harrach	32	10	10	12	36	40	40
AS Khroub	32	9	12	11	30	37	39
Hussein Dey	32	10	9	13	28	35	39
MSP Batna	32	10	8	14	26	35	38
USM Blida	32	8	9	15	23	31	33
MC Saida (R)	32	7	8	17	25	40	29
RC Kouba (R)	32	6	5	21	23	44	23

**1pt deducted for failing to show for a game*

CAMEROON

CAMEROON – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tiko	26	13	10	3	30	19	49
Union Sportive	26	13	6	7	31	23	45
Cotonsport	26	13	6	7	38	21	45
Les Astres	26	11	9	6	31	25	42
Fovu	26	9	9	8	29	27	36
Unisport	26	10	5	11	28	28	35
Panthere	26	8	11	7	26	24	35
Mateiots	26	9	7	10	24	26	34
Canon Sportif	26	9	7	10	32	26	34
University	26	8	8	10	23	25	32
Sable	26	7	11	8	25	29	32
Aigle Royal (R)	26	7	9	10	19	24	30
Danay (R)	26	5	5	16	17	39	20
Mount C* (R)	26	5	7	14	23	40	19

**3pts deducted for forfeiting a game*

ASIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st knockout round*
**All single-leg ties; group winners hosted games*

June 24
Gamba Osaka (Jap) 2 (Leandro 27, 39)
Kawasaki Frontale (Jap) 3 (Nakamura 33, Renatinho 76, Kurotsu 85)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 14,128. **Ref:** Albadwawi (UAE)

June 24
Kashima Antlers (Jap) 2 (Koroki 5, Aoki 50)
Seoul (SKo) 2 (Lee Seung-yeoul 22, Ki Sung-yong 78)
Aet. **HT:** 1-1. **90mins:** 2-2. **Att:** 8,069.
Ref: Williams (Aus)
Seoul 5-4 on pens
Sent off: Ogasawara (Kashima) 64min

June 24
Nagoya Grampus (Jap) 2 (Ogawa 22, Tamada 66)
Suwon Bluewings (SKo) 1 (Edu 69)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 6,859. **Ref:** Irmatov (Uzb)
Sent off: Yang Sang-min (Suwon) 90min

June 24
Pohang Steelers (SKo) 6 (Denilson pen 9, Choi Hyo-jin 15, 63, 72, Kim Jae-sung 56, Ristic 85)
Newcastle Jets (Aus) 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 15,253. **Ref:** Mohd Salleh (Mly)

Quarter-finals draw
Bunyodkor (Uzb) v Pohang Steelers
Kawasaki Frontale v Nagoya Grampus
Pakhtakor (Uzb) v Al Ittihad (Sau)
Umm Salal (Qat) v Seoul
1st legs - Sep 23/24; 2nd legs - Sep 30

AFC CUP

1st knockout round*
**All single-leg ties; group winners hosted games*
June 23: Binh Duong (Vie) 8 Kedah (Mly) 2; Chonburi (Tha) 4 PSMS Medan (Ins) 0; South China (HK) 4 Home United (Sin) 0.

Quarter-finals draw
Al Karama (Syr) v Al Arabi (Kuw)
Chonburi v Binh Duong
Kuwait SC (Kuw) v Arbil (Irq)
Neftchi (Uzb) v South China
1st legs - Sep 15; 2nd legs - Sep 30

CHINA

June 27: Qingdao 0 Henan 1; Chongqing 0 Shaanxi 1; Shandong 1 Changsha 1; Tianjin 3 Shenzhen 0.
June 28: Guangzhou 1 Beijing 1; Dalian 3 Changchun 2; Jiangsu 2 Chengdu 0; Hangzhou 2 Shanghai 0.
July 2: Changchun 2 Hangzhou 0; Shaanxi 1 Changsha 1; Qingdao 0 Guangzhou 0; Beijing 2 Dalian 1; Shandong 0 Jiangsu 0; Shenzhen 1 Chengdu 0; Tianjin 0 Henan 0; Shanghai 3 Chongqing 1.
July 5: Dalian 2 Qingdao 0; Guangzhou 1 Tianjin 1; Chengdu 2 Shandong 1; Jiangsu 1 Shaanxi 0; Chongqing 0 Changchun 0; Hangzhou 2 Beijing 1; Changsha 1 Shanghai 0; Henan 2 Shenzhen 0.

CHINA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Beijing	15	7	6	2	25	13	27
Henan	15	7	5	3	15	10	26
Shandong	15	6	7	2	17	14	25
Changchun	15	7	3	5	19	16	24
Dalian	15	7	2	6	17	16	23
Shanghai	15	6	4	5	19	13	22
Tianjin	15	6	4	5	17	11	22
Jiangsu	15	6	4	5	16	12	22
Changsha	15	5	7	3	12	11	22
Guangzhou	15	5	5	5	19	20	20
Hangzhou	15	6	2	7	18	19	20
Shaanxi	15	4	6	5	13	11	18
Qingdao	15	3	6	6	14	20	15
Shenzhen	15	4	3	8	13	25	15
Chengdu	15	4	2	9	11	20	14
Chongqing	15	1	6	8	8	22	9

JAPAN

June 27: Kyoto 2 Sanfrecce 0; Jubilo 2 Kashiwa 3; JEF 0 Omiya 2; Urawa 2 Vissel 0; Tokyo 2 Shimizu 1.
June 28: Yokohama 1 Gamba 2; Montedio 0 Kawasaki 1; Oita 1 Kashima 2; Albirex 2 Nagoya 1.
July 1: Nagoya 0 Kashima 3; Kawasaki 1 Gamba 0.
July 4: Omiya 0 Yokohama 0; Oita 1 JEF 2; Vissel 0 Tokyo 2; Shimizu 3 Kyoto 3; Kashiwa 0 Albirex 4; Montedio 2 Urawa 3.
July 5: Sanfrecce 0 Jubilo 1; Nagoya 2 Gamba 1; Kawasaki 1 Kashima 1.
July 11: Kashima 2 Omiya 0; Urawa 2 Sanfrecce 1; JEF 1 Vissel 1; Yokohama 1 Montedio 2; Albirex 2 Kawasaki 2; Gamba 1 Shimizu 4.
July 12: Kyoto 1 Kashiwa 2; Tokyo 3 Nagoya 0; Jubilo 3 Oita 1.
July 18: Omiya 0 Tokyo 3; Kawasaki 2 Vissel 2; Yokohama 1 Albirex 1; Shimizu 2 Kashima 2; Nagoya 1 Kyoto 1; Oita 1 Urawa 0.
July 19: Montedio 3 Jubilo 1; Sanfrecce 4 JEF 1; Kashiwa 0 Gamba 2.

JAPAN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kashima	18	13	4	1	29	12	43
Urawa	18	10	4	4	24	18	34
Albirex	18	9	6	3	31	18	33
Kawasaki	18	9	6	3	32	20	33
Tokyo	18	10	1	7	28	23	31
Sanfrecce	18	7	5	6	33	26	26
Gamba	18	8	2	8	32	26	26
Shimizu	18	6	8	4	27	23	26
Jubilo	18	7	3	8	27	31	24
Nagoya	18	6	5	7	20	25	23
Montedio	18	6	4	8	23	23	22
Kyoto	18	6	4	8	20	22	22
Yokohama	18	5	6	7	23	22	21
Omiya	18	5	6	7	22	28	21
Vissel	18	5	4	9	23	31	19
JEF	18	4	7	7	18	27	19
Kashiwa	18	3	6	9	21	39	15
Oita	18	2	1	15	13	32	7

SOUTH KOREA

June 27: Songnam 0 Gwangju 1; Chonbuk 2 Gangwon 5; Daejeon 1 Incheon 1.
June 28: Jeju 2 Busan 0; Daegu 1 Gyeongnam 3; Ulsan 3 Suwon 2; Pohang 2 Chunnam 1.
July 4: Incheon 3 Jeju 3; Gwangju 2 Chonbuk 3; Gangwon 1 Pohang 2; Daejeon 1 Chunnam 0; Suwon 1 Songnam 0; Busan 2 Seoul 2; Gyeongnam 1 Ulsan 1.
July 11: Jeju 1 Chunnam 1; Pohang 2 Gwangju 1.
July 12: Songnam 3 Gyeongnam 1; Chonbuk 1 Suwon 1; Ulsan 3 Daegu 1; Daejeon 2 Gangwon 2; Seoul 5 Incheon 1.
July 18: Chunnam 3 Busan 2; Daegu 0 Chonbuk 3; Gwangju 0 Jeju 1; Ulsan 0 Songnam 0; Suwon 1 Daejeon 0; Gyeongnam 0 Pohang 2.
July 19: Gangwon 1 Seoul 3.

SOUTH KOREA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Seoul	16	10	3	3	29	14	33
Chonbuk	15	9	4	2	33	17	31
Gwangju	16	9	2	5	24	15	29
Pohang	15	6	7	2	24	18	25
Incheon	14	6	5	3	16	16	23
Gangwon	15	5	5	5	28	27	20
Chunnam	15	5	5	5	24	27	20
Songnam	15	5	4	6	16	17	19
Jeju	15	5	4	6	15	20	19
Ulsan	15	4	5	6	17	18	17
Suwon	15	4	5	6	12	16	17
Daejeon	15	3	6	6	14	20	15
Busan	15	3	5	7	19	23	14
Gyeongnam	15	2	8	5	11	18	14
Daegu	15	1	4	10	12	28	7

FORTHCOMING FIXTURES

Ready for the off...Bayern and Schalke

August 2
European Under-19 Championship Final
August 7
Bundesliga starts
August 8
Ligue 1 starts
August 12
World Cup qualifiers (CONCACAF and Europe)
August 15
Premier League starts
August 23
Serie A starts
August 29
La Liga starts

Famous Last Words

Who said what and why

"It's obvious that I'm a less egotistical footballer now"

The ever-modest Cristiano Ronaldo

"The Brazilians are the most difficult and ill-disciplined. If you organise a meeting for 10, they don't care if you let them enter or not. The English arrive at 9.55, the Italian, even if he comes at 10.01, arrives in a hurry and is fed up. The Portuguese are there at 10 or 9.59. A Frenchman, who is always right, comes at 10 but thinks there was no actual reason to be punctual. Russians arrive at 10, not a minute before and not a minute after. They need to be guided"

Jose Mourinho on international relations

"Not reaching the Champions League Final would not define the season as a failure"

Does anyone actually believe Real Madrid director Jorge Valdano?

"For me, it's the turning of a page"

France striker Steve Savidan is forced to retire after a pre-transfer medical at Monaco reveals he has a heart defect

"My wife doesn't like the way of life in Manchester, but I will not be looking for a change because of it...of club, I mean"

Manchester United stopper Nemanja Vidic puts his career ahead of matrimonial harmony

Team work...Mr and Mrs Vidic

"I only supplied positive information on players and others I was asked to report on"

Former Romania star Gica Popescu reveals the extent of his spying for the country's infamous secret police while with Universitatea Craiova

"I'm only in the role of advisor"

Twelve months into his five-year ban from football for corruption, ex-Juventus general manager Luciano Moggi has resurfaced at Bologna, apparently helping the club to look for new shareholders

"Football is the message of love and we are today assembled here because of that"

Hussein Saeed, Iraq football federation president, after 25,000 fans turned up to watch a 3-0 friendly victory over Palestine – the first international game to be played on Iraqi soil since 2002

"It's normal that some people protest because in life it's allowed. Season tickets are down by only 20 per cent, so that shows that 80 per cent of fans are right behind the club"

Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani puts a brave face on the club's problems after fans protest at the sale of Kaka

Problems...Ballack and Fandel never really saw eye to eye

"Figo was really difficult. Michael Ballack too, was not a straightforward customer"

On retiring, top German referee Herbert Fandel opens his Hall of Shame

"Take your millions and go"

A fans' banner at Milan's training ground attacks club owner and Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi

"Here, the limits of acceptable are often crossed. When a team loses, their supporters will come into the dressing room to threaten them"

Corinthians' Ronaldo calls for an end to fan over-reaction in his homeland

NEXT MONTH SEPTEMBER ISSUE ON SALE AUGUST 28

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